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CHRISTIAN CONSOLATION;

OR, THE

Devotional
Explanation
Unity of the Divine Procedure

A

SOURCE OF COMFORT

TO

AFFLICTED CHRISTIANS.

BY THE REV. E. MANNERING,

AUTHOR OF "CHRISTIAN CONSISTENCY," "CHRISTIAN HAPPINESS," ETC.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."—Rom. viii. 28.

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PREFACE.

A FEW years ago the Author published a small volume, entitled, "Christian Consistency ; or, the Connexion between Experimental and Practical Religion. Designed for Young Christians." Having at that time a considerable number of youthful converts under his pastoral care, he deemed it right to press upon their attention those elementary truths which he judged it would be well for them to observe at the commencement of their spiritual career.

Some of these, then "young disciples of the Holy Saviour," have passed into another world—to the "better country," which they sought and early found ; and while other lambs of the flock have risen up to fill their places in the church, many of those who remain, are involved in the duties and cares of life ;

and they require, of course, the counsel which is adapted to their age, circumstances, and responsibilities.

To meet some of their rising wants, as well as to advise and encourage others, he subsequently published "Christian Happiness; or, the Happy Man, the Happy Family, the Happy Church, and the Happiness of Doing Good." "Christian Consistency" was intended to teach them, first, what they ought to be; then, to show them where their strength lieth for the duties and conflicts attendant on their pilgrimage; and also to point out the course which they must pursue to attain to the full assurance of hope, and to enjoy peace in their own souls. "Christian Happiness," was designed to promote their personal and relative bliss; and in pursuance of this purpose, some special directions were given, which, if observed, would, it was hoped, augment their joy as they bowed before God in secret, as they presented their offerings at the family altar, as they exercised their solemn prerogatives in the church, and as they attempted to do good, as their Master did, in the world.

"Christian Consolation" is now presented to the same individuals; but who, having passed from hope

to conflict, and from pleasures to cares, require other nutriment, counsels of another and of a higher kind, and encouragement such as God's afflicted people need, and know how to value.

That the converted may be consistent, the consistent happy, and the happy, when tried, comforted, is the Author's desire, and the contemplated end of his labours. And he is thankful that he has been permitted to accomplish these pastoral designs—trusting that he may thus be instrumental in advancing the work of God amongst a people dear to him in the Gospel. He prays that “they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things;” he desires their happiness, and he has done what he could to promote it; and knowing that many of them are tried, he has attempted to comfort them by the same comfort wherewith he trusts he himself has been comforted of God.

To “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort” he now commends this attempt to console the children of sorrow,—the afflicted of his own circle, and the tried disciples of Christ generally; hoping that the view here taken of the “Unity of the Divine Procedure,” will be the means of refreshing those

whom trials have wearied, of raising their thoughts and affections to the Being who never errs, and of enabling them to "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." May holy, peaceful light be shed upon the mourner's path, by this representation of "the truth as it is in Jesus!" and may He "who comforteth the cast down," bless these meditations upon his character and conduct, to those who, though "in heaviness through manifold temptations," are heirs of eternal life, and whose faith shall be "found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

E. MANNERING.

December 1st, 1843.

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CHRISTIAN CONSOLATION.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY AND EXPLANATORY REMARKS, SUBMITTED TO
THE CONSIDERATION OF AFFLICTED CHRISTIANS.

IN writing these pages, and in now commending them to your serious consideration, I have been influenced by a desire to promote your comfort in seasons of sorrow,—a motive which I am sure you will respect, and which, it is hoped, will induce you to read, in a docile and prayerful spirit, what has been written for your instruction. Having, with yourselves, shared the trials which ordinarily befall the disciples of the Lord Jesus, and having derived much consolation from attention to “the unity of the Divine procedure,” I venture to express a hope that in this treatise you will find both encouragement and counsel—*the* encouragement which your gracious God offers you, and *the* counsel which it is his will you should obey.

As his afflicted people, you may rely on having the sympathy of Jesus. You may expect the timely interference of his wisdom and power. He feels for you; he pities you; in all your affliction he is afflicted; and he lives to do you good. There are storms which he only can quell, and human aid apart from his, is comparatively useless; but as he works upon one mind by the influence of another, so he makes his tried servants the messengers of peace to their sorrowing companions. It is the duty of those whom he hath consoled, to endeavour to comfort others; and he who attempts to guide the mourners in Zion to the streams which have refreshed his own soul, may hope to be instrumental in accomplishing some of the Divine intentions towards the sons and daughters of care. God wills their salvation and their comfort too. No one can read the Bible attentively, without perceiving that he has provided as amply for their consolation in this suffering world, as he has for their bliss in the world where suffering is unknown. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God," Isa. xl. 1; and the Holy Ghost is constituted "the Comforter,"—a title from which may be inferred the certainty of both sorrow and support. The Holy Spirit bears not this name in vain. He is sent by the Father as the fruit of Christ's mediation, to refresh and

strengthen the heirs of promise; and his consolations are strong, abundant, and continuous.

But he never secures the end of his mission by coercion, or by any measures that have even a remote tendency to disturb the arrangements of the everlasting covenant. Comfort is not administered by physical power; and if tried Christians live in the habitual violation of any one of the Redeemer's precepts, they cannot expect to be consoled by his promises. The work of the Spirit is regulated by wisdom and love, and is as certainly directed to the honour of God, as to the relief of his tried people. He comforts, not all men, but believers; and those believers only who are humble, contrite, and who tremble at his word. Isa. lvii. 15. A rebellious child can no more reasonably hope for the comforts of God, than an unconverted alien. Before a *sinner* is comforted, he is convinced of sin, and humbled on account of it; and before a *believer* can be consoled, he must yield to the will of the Being who comforts him. So that, apart from the direct work of "the Comforter," upon which too much stress cannot be laid, as *he only* can soothe the troubled heart,—the state of our minds in relation to God's will has much to do with our joy or sorrow in tribulation. To think of earning comfort, and of receiving it as wages for work done, is out of the

question: comfort is God's gift, and must be sought and accepted as a boon of his royal bounty; yet the heart into which the streams of love are poured, must be prepared for their reception.

——“The wise
Have still the keeping of their proper peace;
Are guardians of their own tranquillity.”

This fact alone should lead us to attach much importance to that acquiescence in the Divine will, both as to calm submission and active service, which these pages are designed to inculcate and encourage. That God's tried people may be comforted, they must yield to his discipline. Any positive unbelief as to the necessity of their trials, or as to the wisdom and kindness of God when he tries them, will increase the moral malady which sanctified affliction is intended to restrain; and must thereby exclude the healing influences of his love. When we are afflicted, we must not consider ourselves doomed to ills which can neither be removed nor turned to our advantage. Such a conclusion would deprive us of all hope and energy; and would be as much at variance with fact, as it would be injurious to our peace. In every trial we may, we ought, to recognise and own the will of God, who “is love;” and to do this, is just to open the heart to the tide of his favour, flow it in which

direction soever it may. Reconciliation to the methods of Providence is as essential to the comfort of a believer, as faith in Christ is essential to the peace of a sinner. Before a sinner can be safe, he must receive the atonement; and before a tried Christian can be happy, he must accept chastisement. When we can say, "The will of the Lord be done," we may hope to receive the comforts of his word, and to enjoy the presence and supports of his Spirit. "O Lord, thou condescendest to call thyself my Father, and to speak of correction as the effect of thy love. O welcome, welcome, those afflictions, which are the tokens of thy paternal affection, the marks of my adoption into thy family! Thou knowest what discipline I need. Thou seest, O Lord, how much folly there is in the heart of thy poor froward and thoughtless child; and knowest what rods and what strokes are needful to drive it away. I would bear thy strokes, not merely because I cannot resist them, but because I love and trust in thee. I would sweetly acquiesce and rest in thy will, as well as stoop to it. Yea, Lord, I would praise thee, that thou wilt show so much regard to me, as to apply such remedies as these to the diseases of my mind, and art thus kindly careful to train me up for glory."*

* Doddridge.

This leads me to make one or two observations on the importance of studying the Scriptures, and of seeking our consolations direct from God, through the medium of his word. In this age of book-making, there is a danger of the one Book being neglected. So many streams are flowing forth, in every direction, that if we are not upon our guard, the fountain will be forsaken. The Saviour has promised that rivers of living water shall flow from those who receive a plentiful supply of his Spirit, John vii. 37; and if those rivers take their natural direction, they are sure to *re-join* their source, bearing with them the hearts they have refreshed. But the attempt to comfort those whom the Lord hath smitten, must fail, if human writings are allowed to absorb any measure of that attention which is due to the sacred Scriptures. I am therefore desirous of impressing upon you the necessity of consulting the holy oracles on all occasions, and of scrupulously regarding their counsels. If what is submitted to you in this volume shall in any way divert your attention from "the law and the testimony," upon the fact coming before me, I shall regret having written a single word. For this reason I here offer you a few cautionary remarks.

Do not read this book, or a chapter of it, to save you the trouble of studying God's word; nor

think that attention to the latter is in any measure superseded by a careful perusal of the former. The word of God is the man of your counsel; its mandates you must cheerfully obey; its promises you must cordially believe; its pages you ought to ponder by day and by night. One of my designs is to help you to study the Bible profitably, and to bring before you, when they are most needed, those truths of revelation which are peculiarly adapted to the wants and circumstances of the afflicted. All Scripture being given by inspiration of God, one part has as strong a claim to your attention as another; but it is natural that tried believers should look to those parts which are suited to their condition, and from which it is evidently God's will they should derive comfort. My object has been to select and arrange some points of truth, upon which afflicted Christians should cast their eye and fix their hopes.

Having given good heed to revealed truth, you must honour the Holy Spirit, the Author of all spiritual enjoyments. We are absolutely, entirely dependent on him for comfort. In him, therefore, we must trust, and to his counsels we must attend. Were the Bible to be taken away from us, had not uninspired men written a single volume, and were the accesses of the God of love to the heart direct, unconnected with any inter-

mediate agency, we should not be more dependent on the Holy Spirit for consolation than we are now ; although we have the word of life, and a multitude of subordinate helps. The Holy Ghost is *the* Comforter ; it is *his* province to console sorrowful minds. To accomplish his will he employs appropriate means, and sanctified men are his messengers to the house of mourning ; but thoughts are vapour and words air, apart from his sovereign and gracious influence. The most talented preachers, the most affectionate pastors, have failed in some of their attempts to heal “the broken in heart,” either because of the inappropriateness of their methods, or because the Holy Spirit, for reasons known to himself, has not succeeded their efforts with his effectual blessing. The *depths* of human distress can be reached only by his arm ; the tumults of the mind can be allayed only by his almighty fiat. To comfort those who mourn is his work ; and when the work is done, he must be honoured for having done it.

Yes, we must look to the Holy Spirit for consolation, seek it in his way, and accept it upon his terms. Into the mysterious mode, or modes, of his gracious operations, in allaying fear, in giving hope, it were alike profitless and presumptuous to inquire. As “the Spirit of wisdom and

understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord," he has access to the heart that needs his presence and aid. "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" 1 Cor. vi. 19. "He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." John xiv. 17. There he is, not only as the eternal Spirit—the Spirit from whose presence there is no fleeing—but as "the Comforter;" he is there in his official character, vested with authority both by the Father and the Son, to minister to the necessities of the saints. As the Comforter—*your* Comforter,—his resources are infinite. Jesus is not more qualified to save you, than is the Spirit to comfort you; and the work of the Spirit bears so vital and so important a connexion to the work of Christ, that he can comfort *you* only in such a way as will honour *him*, and will teach you the power of his death and the preciousness of his love.

You must not, then, expect to be comforted when your views of Jesus and of his official dignity are obscure, and when your estimate of his atoning blood and justifying righteousness is low. Neither must you imagine that Christian consolation consists in a kind of mental abstraction from earthly cares and duties, or in a sort of morbid religious sentimentalism, the mind being

then rather lulled into a senseless calm, than awed into an intelligent repose. The Holy Spirit comforts the objects of his gracious care, by his own benign and sovereign influence ; but his attention to their wants and woes is regulated by his concern for the honour of Christ. “ He shall glorify me,” said the Redeemer ; “ for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.” John xvi. 14. So that instead of coming with his consoling grace to those who have wandered from the Lord, and whose minds are so absorbed with their little worldly concerns, as to have forgotten the “ great salvation,” he fetches them back to the cross with weeping, and then uses the Saviour’s death to accomplish in their souls the purposes of his love.

Some Christians are so perpetually musing and conversing on the corruptions of their nature, and on the trifling inconveniences of life—for many of their trials are nothing more—as almost to forget that for them the Son of God became incarnate, died, and rose again ; and that grace was given them in him before the world began. Yet these are the facts from which Christian comfort principally springs, and without which the Divine Spirit scarcely ever allays a fear, or excites a hope. It is a great mercy to have the mind drawn away from objects and circumstances which

tend to carnalise the affections, and thereby to unfit us for the conflicts of faith, and to be brought into fellowship with the Saviour's cross and crown—his crucifixion on earth and his enthronement in heaven. Without pretending to discern what other minds overlook, and disavowing the attempts and responsibilities of a censor, I may nevertheless be permitted to express my conviction, that the cross of Christ is not invariably presented to the minds of the afflicted as it ought to be. The mysterious person of the Lord Jesus, the designs and consequences of his first advent, with the prospect and results of the second; the vast and mighty interests of his mediatorial reign, as they affect God, relate to the myriads whom he hath chosen to life everlasting, and constitute the grace and the glory of that system of means by which the heirs of promise are meetened for their rich and imperishable inheritance;—these topics, and others connected with them, do not sufficiently engage the attention of afflicted Christians; and we might add, without subjecting ourselves to the charge of misrepresenting motives or measures, that those whom the Lord hath appointed to “strengthen the weak hands and to confirm the feeble knees,” frequently attempt their work of mercy without gathering and using the materials which the cross supplies for such a purpose. The

apostle's determination not to know anything among men, save Jesus Christ and him crucified, 1 Cor. ii. 2, is a purpose for all times and for all places; equally befitting the preacher of righteousness in the great congregation, or the pastor in the house of mourning, at the bed of sickness and of death. To dispel the darkness of the unenlightened understanding, to allay the anxiety of the troubled conscience, to silence the murmurings of a discontented mind, and to elevate to hope and confidence those whom trials have oppressed and discouraged, we must receive our light, derive our power, and draw our arguments from the cross. There is that in the sufferings and death of Jesus which afflicted Christians want, no less than awakened sinners. The truth that gave the jailor peace, turned the prison in which *they* were confined who preached it, into a bethel: the death of Christ was *his* hope and *their* consolation. Acts xvi. 23—34.

How obvious, therefore, it is, that Satan robs tried believers of their peace, by hiding the cross from their view, and by so magnifying a trifling care, as to represent it as an empire of woe! His most subtle and malicious designs are seen and felt here. By keeping Christ in the shades, he shuts out the light which, if permitted to enter, would disclose to us, first, the almost nothingness

of our trials, then our inconceivably glorious prospects. With a clear view of the cross, and with the blood of atonement on the conscience, it is scarcely possible for us to be unlawfully sad; and when the Holy Spirit shows us the beauty of Christ, he does, most convincingly, prove himself the Comforter, and in a most merciful way he accomplishes his gracious will. To be drawn to Jesus in fervent desire, in earnest prayer, in humble confidence, with supreme affection, is to be comforted; and if Christians would but contemplate his glory, be satisfied with his goodness, and promote his honour, they would neither complain of their trials, nor murmur at him for sending them. An experimental acquaintance with the person and grace, the righteousness and glory of the Lord Jesus, is essential to true, solid comfort. The apostle Paul was joyful in all his tribulation, because in all his labours and sufferings the cross of Christ was his refuge and home. In Christ, he saw and conversed with God; and through him he had access to the power and love which sustained him in every conflict, and cheered him in every trial. Who that is acquainted with Paul's experience can doubt this? and those who adopt his reasonings and pursue his course, will never be comfortless. The secret of pure, permanent comfort, lies in communion with a crucified and

glorified Redeemer. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Phil. iii. 7—9.

"The cross, it takes our guilt away :
It holds the fainting spirit up :
It cheers with hope the gloomy day,
And sweetens every bitter cup.

It makes the coward spirit brave,
And nerves the feeble arm for fight ;
It takes all terror from the grave,
And gilds the bed of death with light.

The balm of life, the cure of woe,
The measure and the pledge of love ;
The sinner's refuge here below,
The angels' theme in heaven above."

We are here reminded of another principle, which, to be consoled in affliction, we must admit and apply.

As the Holy Spirit is the Comforter by being the glorifier of Christ, in our desires for consolation, whether they lead to prayer, to the study of the

Bible, or to fellowship with "the excellent of the earth," we must be influenced by a concern for the honour of Christ. "Help us, O Lord, for the glory of thy name," is a prayer and a plea which we must adopt on all occasions; for if we are indifferent to the Saviour's praise, we shall be deprived of the light and power which give peace and strength to the heart that knows and obeys his will. "God hath made all things for himself," and he renews and sanctifies his people for his glory. Prov. xvi. 4. Isa. xliii. 21. His glory is the ultimate end of all things; and as we are to employ means for our own relief in trial, it is wisdom to adopt those upon which we are confident he will smile, and also to contemplate an end which we have no doubt he will help us to attain.

Are we, then, when sorrows abound, to be indifferent to the peace of our own souls, and to concern ourselves only and exclusively with the Redeemer's glory? Certainly not. And this is not the form which the inquiry should assume; for we are never called upon to forget our own spiritual wants and cares. Yet as this question may arise in the mind of some afflicted Christian, when he is exhorted to "glorify God in the fires," we have introduced it, that we may have an opportunity of exposing and of correcting his mistake.

I do not remember of whom, but I have of some one caught an idea which is worthy of being recorded, that if tried Christians would think more of the Saviour's glory, and less about themselves, it would be a most effectual method of obtaining the comfort they need. I may not use the precise phraseology in which this thought was originally clothed, but the idea itself is excellent ; and while it reminds us of an error, common to most Christians, it suggests a remedy which cannot be applied without great advantage. The burden of the cry of many is, Comfort, comfort, oh, give us comfort ! They pray, they read the Scriptures, they attend the preaching of the gospel, to be comforted ; and if they find no comfort, they rise from their knees distressed, shut the Bible with a heavy heart, and leave the house of God complaining either that the chief Shepherd hath not spoken to their souls, or that his servants have not been ministers of mercy to them in their trouble. "Some hearers of the gospel like to have nothing said but what is encouraging and comforting. Such resemble persons in weak health who would be always taking cordials, which though they may for a time raise the spirit, yet secretly undermine the strength."*

Is it not so? Let some distressed, unhappy Christians supply the answer. And without expressing an opinion on the effect which the absence of the blessings they seek has upon their minds—for unanswered prayers, and disappointed hopes, may irritate a wounded spirit—it must be remarked that the child ought to seek its happiness by seeking its father's honour, rather than by devoting its attention to its own gratification, irrespective of his glory. The selfishness of our fallen nature is often seen and heard in affliction; and before peace can be expected to throw its tranquillising influence over the minds of some tried Christians, the flesh must undergo a second crucifixion. If while sorrowing believers cry, Lord, heal me, for I am wounded; console me, for I am sorrowful, they would inquire, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" it would be well for them—better far than the piteous moanings, than the morbid lamentations, in which they so freely, so frequently indulge. Many afflicted Christians can glorify Christ by active service, and all may honour him by patient, cheerful submission; and the reason why consolation is sometimes withholden from them, is their unwillingness to yield to his appointments. If the command is, "Arise, and work for me;" or, "Be still, and suffer for me;" the command in either

case must be obeyed, or the heart will be left unsoothed, and without conscious help. Those believers who will not labour and suffer that Christ may be glorified, when it is evidently his will they should do so, must not be surprised if he should send them to their graves mourning. What a blessing would it be to some pious people, if they could be roused to activity, as well as calmed into submission ! There is too much love of ease among them, for their spirits to be cheered with the joys of God's salvation. Those who seek to glorify Christ where he hath placed them, and who are willing to honour him in the way which he hath appointed, cannot long be deprived of the richest of the Holy Spirit's consolations. The secret of comfort lies in a deep concern for the Saviour's glory. "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." 1 Sam. ii. 30.

There are two other observations which I am desirous of making in this introductory chapter, because, while they are explanatory of the Divine conduct, they are admonitory of yours !

Consolation is not the only gift you need. This is promised you, and this you may hope to obtain ; but there are other gifts which are as essential to your peace as this, and which, in fact, must precede it ; in other words, there are states of

mind of which you must be the actual and the conscious possessors, before you can realise, amidst your trials, the support of the Divine arm, and the succour of the Divine favour. You must not, therefore, seek abstract comfort, or comfort and nothing else; nor ought you to read this book, or any other, with an exclusive reference to the peace of your minds. If you do, you will be betrayed into a mistake, fatal, for the time, to your purpose and hope. You seek consolation, and you expect to realise it; but what if you are unprepared to receive it, and are not, therefore, the persons to whom it is promised? Can you reasonably expect to enjoy it? And we are not supposing an improbable case. We have already seen that the comfort of the saint must comport with the Divine honour; and one of the principles on which we have reasoned is, that affliction is often a parental chastisement for pride, for unbelief, or for some other infirmity incident to our fallen nature. So that if our troubles should be the fruits of our sin and folly—of our sin, in having departed from God; of our folly, in having formed unwise purposes, or in having adopted inappropriate methods to realise lawful objects, before we can be consoled, we must be convinced of our mistake, and mourn over it. And unless attention be paid to this, you may seek what, in

your present state of mind, you will never find ; and thus not only waste time, and exhaust your energies, but even increase the trouble which already is more than you can well bear. You may be unthankful for the mercies which you possess ; you may murmur against God for having tried you ; you may be distrustful just at the moment when your faith is tested, and tested only, that being approved, it may be strengthened and honoured ; you may covet the gifts which God sees it right to withhold ; and your acquiescence in his disciplinary methods may be rather reluctant submission than complacent approval. Should this be the case, or should you have fallen into other practical errors, before you can be comforted, you must be corrected.

Take another cautionary hint, relating to a fact which we cannot but deplore. All our cares are to be cast upon God, with every burden, whatever be its character or its cause. He permits, yea, he commands us to do this. "The Lord calls for our burdens ; he would not have us oppressed with them ourselves ; but roll them on him."* But besides this Divinely appointed method of obtaining relief, which is always an effectual one, one that cannot be tried in vain, there are others to be

* Mrs. Hawkes.

adopted. If we wish God's end to be accomplished, we must not disturb his order of means ; and if, when he opens a way of escape from trouble, we refuse to enter, we dishonour him, and, so far as this goes, frustrate the intentions of his love. Yet some Christians frequently do this. Their trials may be to them a heavy cross, although their cross may scarcely amount to a trial at all ; and as they evince so much anxiety about the *facts* of providence, if they would exercise their common sense in relation to the *laws* of providence, they would be relieved of much of their gloom, and the scenes of life would brighten around them. There are trials which no human wisdom or power can control, "for who can make that straight which the Lord hath made crooked?" but some people make that crooked which he hath made straight, and they seem to be determined to be vexed and care-worn all their journey through. Mercies are so diminished that they can scarcely discern them, and miseries are so magnified as to fill the whole range of vision. Nothing is seen but mountains of difficulty ; nothing is felt but a heavy pressure of care. Whereas, if they would only judge of things with a sober, rational mind, and employ the means which an enlightened understanding, were they to consult it, would suggest, they would be as thankful and as cheerful

as other men. With, or without cause, they always complain; and though they dread the outward cross, they seldom make an effort to escape it; they quarrel with trials, yet they seem as if they could not live a day without them. Even when comfort flows towards them from the God of love, though they long for it, and complain when they have it not—as if *they* of all persons were entitled to it—they either throw up an embankment, so that it cannot refresh and make them fruitful; or else, by their fretfulness and unbelief, they embitter the streams, and turn the living water into a stagnant pool. They will not use common sense methods to relieve themselves of trouble, and the comforts of the Spirit are refused. Mrs. Hawkes has very justly remarked, “When Providence favours an invalid with means of restoration to health—the second greatest blessing we can enjoy—it is as proper to be active, diligent, and conscientious in using those means, as to be found in the practice of any other duty that is enjoined upon us.”

Against the anomaly, a troubled soul putting far from it the consolations of truth, watch and pray; and with holy joy and devout thankfulness accept the help and receive the love of the Spirit, whensoever it may be offered you.

“ When, alas ! the spirits languish,
Vexed by unrelenting ill,
Oft the soul amidst its anguish
Asks if Jesus loves it still.

Yes, amidst these clouds of sorrow,
Though no rays of comfort shine,
He, the same to-day, to-morrow,
Captive mourner, still is thine.

Why, then, in this vale of sadness
Sinks thy languid heart so low ;
Since such streams of health and gladness
From the wounds of Jesus flow ?

Do corroding cares oppress thee ?
On his bosom let them fall.
Does tormenting pain distress thee ?
Jesus has a balm for all.

Though unnumbered ills annoy thee,
For thy weal each woe is sent ;
'Tis to humble, not destroy thee,
That the chastening rod is sent.

Hear its voice and ponder o'er it,
Ask thy heart what idol's there,
Pluck it hence, no more adore it,—
Jesus will no rival bear.”

CHAPTER II.

THE CHRISTIAN AN OBJECT OF GOD'S SPECIAL CARE.

To doubt this, is to disbelieve the Bible, or to question the veracity of its Divine author. "He careth for you," is an expression as simple as it is consoling, and one which a peasant can understand as well as a philosopher. The word of life is not always the light of day to us; for some truths, though vital and important, are obscure, arising, in great part, from their spirituality and glory, and which render a clear perception of them difficult to our obtuse minds. But on the subject now to engage our attention, there hangs not even the semblance of mystery, and he that would find difficulties must first create them.

The care of the Creator over his creatures, generally, is apparent in the provisions which he has made for their necessities,—provisions adapted to their nature and wants; and the interest he takes in *their* welfare guarantees the superintendence of

his wisdom and the gifts of his mercy to those who cast their care upon him, and live to his glory. "Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" Matt. vi. 26. His providence is universal; it extends to all the works of his hands: all creatures wait upon him, and he gives them their meat in due season; but to those who fear him, his regards and attentions are special and peculiar. When he speaks of them, he employs terms of striking signification. When he addresses them, either to allay anxiety or to excite hope, he uses phraseology of the tenderest import; and he speaks thus plainly and affectionately, that he may be understood and trusted; first, that they may know his mind, and then, that they may be conscious of the blessed position in which he has placed them.

The unity of God's designs is a source of consolation to his afflicted people; but that they may have the full benefit of his thoughts and purposes, and be assured that the reasons by which they are urged to contentment and thankfulness are just, it will be necessary to show them that they stand in a particular relation both to his character and government. No communications can possibly be more explicit than those which state the care of

God over them in all places, and under all circumstances. They are his, his own, his especial property. He claims them. He wishes it to be understood that he has interests in them so important and commanding, that he cannot forsake them, and that for his own pleasure and glory he must bless them and make them blessings. He thinks *about* them and *for* them. He orders their goings ; he manages their affairs ; and he has so arranged his plans, and the modes of accomplishing them, as to govern the world for their benefit, and to render the movements of his providence subservient to the higher and more glorious purposes of his grace. "All things are for your sakes." "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." 2 Cor. iv. 15 ; Rom. viii. 28.

To this wise and merciful adjustment of events, to this law of the Divine government, we shall hereafter have occasion more specially to advert. It is here noticed because we wish it to be regarded as one of those considerations, in our course of inquiry, to which more than ordinary importance should be attached ; and because we are anxious that the children of sorrow should welcome to their hearts the strong consolations which God

hath placed before them in his word. If "all things work" for their benefit, then by all, not by some, to the exclusion of others, we are taught the love and care of God; and "if all things *work together* for their good," then by a comprehensive view, as well as by a minute analysis of them, we must reach a conclusion in which the judgment may find the solution of its difficulties, and the heart the home of its delights.

This is not a theory upon which we may speculate, nor a scheme thrown out to gratify the curious, or to divert the anxious mind from a perplexity to which it must again recur, unrelieved and unsoothed; but a fact in the government of the all-wise and merciful God, intended to teach his tried people the deep concern he takes in their welfare, and to lead them, when their hearts are overwhelmed, to the Rock of their salvation, from which they may calmly survey the path they have trod, and, above harm, smile at the thundering elements beneath them. Only let this fact be admitted, let it be allowed to speak as a witness, to plead as an advocate, to determine as a judge, and "as our sufferings abound, so our consolations by Christ must abound also." Though we smart under the rod, we shall adore the wisdom, and praise the mercy that guides the stroke.

“Thou hast gained in the furnace of affliction, self-knowledge,
patience, and humility,

“And these be as precious ore, that waiteth the skill of the
coiner :

“Despise not the blessings of adversity, nor the gain thou
hast earned so hardly ;

“And now thou hast drained the bitter, take heed that thou
lose not the sweet.”*

“He careth for you.” Yes, his people are precious in his sight ; and the expressions of his love, in the Holy Scriptures, are sufficiently explicit to convey to their minds refreshing assurances of the tenderness and constancy of his care. And it must be remembered that “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,” 2 Pet. i. 21 ; so that the firmest reliance may be placed on all their statements affecting this question. They received from God the communications they imparted. By his authority they announced his gracious intentions ; and their experience constrained them to bear their unwavering testimony to his favour and friendship. They knew that he taught the ignorant, guided the perplexed, succoured the wounded, and nourished the feeble. And as the written records of his mercy are sustained and illustrated by the continuous operations of his providence and grace,

his people may now derive instruction and comfort from the facts which occurred, and from the promises which were made, in the successive ages of the church, from that in which Adam was cheered by the promise of Messiah's victory over the serpent, to that in which John was cast "to the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." God has always protected his people in danger, and counselled them in difficulty. Are they weak? He engages to strengthen them. When they are injured, he avenges their cause. He inspires the timid with courage, allays the fears of the doubting, and gives stability to their confidence in his oath and promise. Do they weep? He catches their tears in his bottle. Do they groan? He enters their complaints in his book. When they are forsaken by father and mother, he takes them up. His eye is ever upon them, his ear is always open to their cry, his everlasting arms are underneath them. By day and by night, abroad and at home, when they travel by land or by water, alone or with others, he is their Keeper. He is a Captain to the Christian warrior, a Guide to the weary pilgrim, a Shepherd to the flock. He restrains those who are disposed to wander from the path of life, and restores those who have wandered, to their places in either the family or

the camp. He allows no events that concern his people to escape his notice, and those which he does not appoint, he controls; so that the minutest incident of their being is made subservient to their advantage. "Oh, that we regarded not only the God who governs the stars, but the God of minute providences, the Over-ruler of moments;"*

"Commit thy trifles unto God, for to him is nothing trivial;
"And it is but the littleness of man that seeth no greatness
in trifles.

"Regard nothing lightly which the wisdom of Providence
hath ordered."†

His people cannot go where he is not, nor where they may not realise his presence and favour. They are his inheritance, his habitation, his peculiar treasure, his husbandry, his building, his property. He calls them his jewels, his precious sons. He keeps them as the apple of the eye; and he has so identified their interests with his own, as to regard what is done to them as done to himself. He has commanded them to trust him at all times, and with all their circumstances. He wishes them to know that they are his children, and that he will act a father's part towards them. He has provided for all their spiritual and temporal necessities, for their comfort in life, for

* Cecil.

† Proverbial Philosophy.

their safety in death, for their happiness in eternity. His promises are exceeding great and precious. His counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. His care is unremitting and unerring: it is directed to the most important objects, it is regulated by the purest benevolence, it never fails to secure the happiest results. His knowledge being perfect, he can never be thwarted by unanticipated events. His power being infinite, he cannot be frustrated by any uncontrollable occurrences. What he designs to do, he does; and he accomplishes his purposes by the fittest means and at the best period; while the obscurity which we often perceive about his ways, arises not from any confusion, or defect in his government, but from the ignorance of those whom he governs. They see not with his eye, neither do they judge with his judgment; did they, they would repose in conscious security when the elements about them were the most disturbed, and perceive the perfection of order in the most chequered dispensations.

“Thy flock, thy own peculiar care,
Though now they seem to roam uneyed;
Are led, or driven, only where
They best and safest may abide.”

They are under his care,—the care of Almighty God. He employs angels and men to effect his

purposes, and subordinates second causes to his own will; but his care is not on that account divested of those peculiarities which teach us to regard it as especially his own. All creatures are his servants; and whether he employ a raven to feed Elijah, or an angel to comfort Daniel; whether he break the loaf and distribute it with his own hand, or whether he commission the rich to feed the poor in his name, the goodness by which they are supported is his own. Let the messenger be whom he may, friend or foe; let manna come direct from the skies, or let bread be earned by industrious toil, the Father feeds the child, and to the Father the child is indebted for all he receives. In every gift that comes, and in every comfort that departs, the hand of the Lord is to be seen. If he employed none of his creatures to minister to the heirs of salvation, but by continued miracles answered their requests and ministered to their wants, his care over them would not be more direct or special than it is.

Then he cares for his people individually. Not simply as communities, congregations, or families, or even as *the multitude* which no man can number. His church is one, and to his church, indeed, including the faithful in all places, he has made promises, which he will fulfil to the security and joy of "the whole family in heaven and in earth."

But such is the care he takes of each, that if there were but one Christian in the world, *that one* disciple could not be more directly under the notice and superintendence of God than is the lowliest, the most afflicted believer upon earth; although, besides himself, there are myriads living upon the bounty and sharing the love of his Almighty Father.

“There are who sigh that no fond heart is theirs,
None loves them best—O vain and selfish sigh!
Out of the bosom of his love, he spares—
The Father spares the Son, for thee to die:
For thee he died, for thee he lives again:
O’er thee he watches in his boundless reign.

Thou art as much his care, as if beside
Nor man nor angel lived in heaven or earth.
Thus sun-beams pour alike their glorious tide
To light up worlds, or wake an insect’s mirth.
They shine, and shine with unexhausted store—
Thou art thy Saviour’s—ask no more.”

The diversity in the circumstances of the godly, which every where appears, instead of telling against this truth, rather confirms it, and settles our faith in it. The same discipline will not do for all minds. Even godly people are differently constituted, and require to be led and taught in a way and by means adapted to their physical and mental temperament. So that even the changes of life are only the varied aspects in which the

wisdom and love of God may be seen, and ought to be contemplated; and which have been assumed to meet the innumerable necessities of those, each of whose names is recorded in the book of life. That providential mercies appear to be unequally distributed, is certain; but that the distribution is in all cases wise and kind, is equally certain. And though the reasons do not in every case appear, why one Christian should be rich and another poor; why one should rise into prosperity and another should be borne down by adversity; yet that there are reasons, is as certain as that there are trials. How precious is the thought,—God, our Father, has reasons, though we may not know them, for inflicting the stroke which causes the heart to bleed! Shortly before Dr. Payson died, he was asked if he could see any particular reason for the heavy afflictions which had for some time been upon him: he replied, “No; but I am as well satisfied as if I could see ten thousand: God’s will is the very perfection of all reason.” Alluding to her trials, Mrs. Hawkes said, “Since it is the Divine will, that is enough, without any other reason whatever.”

Afflicted Christian, will *you* admit this? It is truth; and truth of too much importance to allow of its being passed by without due improvement. *God’s will is the perfection of all reason.* Get this

sentiment into your hearts as a ruling principle. It will save you from a thousand mistakes, and will open to you as many sources of consolation. Your woes and your wants bear a very near relation to the will of God; and though perfect representations cannot be made of the love of your heavenly Father, yet if there be reality and sincerity in earthly parental attachments and professions, you have at least one sure mode of ascertaining how deeply he feels for you, how tenderly he sympathises with you, and how dependent you are on his care. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." Psa. ciii. 13. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem." Isa. lxvi. 13.

The Lord, remember, is the judge of your condition and necessities; and he is also the friend of your best interests—I say of your *best* interests, because he is opposed to your pride, carnality, selfishness, and unbelief; and in employing any measures, even the most severe, to make you more spiritual and holy, he gives you convincing proofs of his concern for your happiness both here and hereafter. But if you forget this, you will deprive yourselves of one of the chief sources of your comfort. Why has God so often and so plainly told you, that he careth for you,

but to calm your minds when storms arise, to confirm your faith when foes assail, and to refresh your spirit while passing through this weary land? But to have the advantage of what he does, you must believe what he says. If you doubt his promise, you close your hearts against the love from which it flows. Do not then hesitate to admit in your case—for though you are afflicted, you are his—what you are prepared to admit in the case of others. If you do not credit the Divine testimony in seasons of trial and disappointment, how can you be either relieved of your burdens, or supported under them? In the absence of some promised blessings, what have you to quiet the spirit while hope is deferred, but the promise of other blessings, and the assurance that He who has all good at command, is your Father and Friend? If you go into the furnace without this conviction, you cannot expect either to glorify God, or to enjoy his presence; but if you enter with this persuasion, you will pass through the trial,—I will not say without injury—this is only half the tale,—but with great advantage. Whatever you suffer, through what changes soever you pass, if you have scriptural evidence of being the objects of his care, great will be your peace. Commit your way to him. Cast your care—*all* your care, upon him—the care of the body, of the

soul, of the family, of the church ; “for he careth for you.”

“The privilege I greatly prize,
Of casting all my care on Him—
The mighty God, the only wise,
Who reigns in heaven and earth supreme.

How sweet to be allowed to call
The God whom heaven adores, my Friend !
To tell my thoughts, to tell him all,
And then to know my prayers ascend.

My Father’s wisdom cannot err,
His love no change nor failure knows :
Be mine his counsel to prefer,
And acquiesce in all he does.”

CHAPTER III.

AFFLICTIONS COMMON TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

AFFLICTED Christians are sometimes tempted to think it marvellous that they should be tried, and tried in the way in which God hath laid his hand upon them. They are also disposed to believe, either that God has departed from his ordinary course of procedure in his dealings with them, or that their afflictions indicate the withdrawal of his favour from them.

All this is to be deplored ; and as it is impossible for any tried Christian to rejoice in tribulation, or patiently to endure it, while these impressions remain, we must try to convince him of his mistake. To receive the comforts of God's Spirit, he must be in no error respecting the nature and design of his dispensations. At once, then, we wish to disabuse his mind of the prejudice which has given to his thoughts a wrong direction ; and to convince him that there is nothing singular in

the position which, as an afflicted Christian, he occupies. He is one of many ; and he is only sharing, in common with others, the trials of life. If no one had ever been tried as he is tried, if the principles of others had never been tested as his have been, he might be alarmed ; but as his associates in the church are his companions in tribulation, and as while they have been tried, they have also been comforted, he ought not to despair of realising their consolations. He may, in his measure, like his Divine Master, be a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ; but there are many tried ones with him in adverse circumstances.

Yes, believer, as a sufferer you rank with sufferers, and with those, to whom, though they are “in heaviness through manifold temptations,” “precious promises” are made, and for whom the sweetest rest is provided. And if the supposed singularity of your case can but be made to disappear, much of the gloom that now hangs about your spirit will pass away,—you will find yourself placed where you may be happy, and ought to be thankful. The path you tread has been trodden by others. Every bitter ingredient in your cup has been tasted by others. In every conceivable form of discipline, the rod has already been used. The waters through which you are passing, have again

and again been divested of their power to overwhelm the host of God's elect. Your discipline is both a tried and an approved one. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 1 Cor. x. 13. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." John xvi. 33. "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord." Zeph. iii. 12. "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Acts xiv. 22. "If so be we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Rom. viii. 17. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." Psal. xxxiv. 19. "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." Isa. xlviii. 10. "These are they which came out of great tribulation." Rev. vii. 14.

With these statements—and with such the word of God abounds, what reason, it may be asked, have afflicted Christians to think their case singular? The absence of trial would be strange, indeed; its presence can excite no surprise: especially, as the history of the church, from the beginning down to the present day, has recorded

the fact, that while consolation has strengthened the saints to suffer, suffering, almost always, has preceded, because it has prepared them to receive consolation. The patriarchal age was an age of suffering to Noah, to Abraham, to Joseph, and to others. The prophetical age was afflictive. Our times are paradisiacal compared with theirs who lived and laboured immediately after the departure of the Lord to his rest. What inroads, since then, have the enemies of truth made upon the quietude and comfort of personal and domestic life ! The church lives, it is true ; but she has struggled for existence ;—the church is free, but she fought for her liberty, and even bled for the privileges which we enjoy. The civil power has opposed her progress ; the ecclesiastical has spoiled her of her beauty ; the secular and the religious have combined to drive the armies of light from the field. Much human blood has been shed. Many hearts have been wounded. Rights have been disregarded. Families have been scattered. Property has been confiscated. Great, indeed, has been the devastation both in dark and in enlightened times ; and, but for God's care of his witnesses, the place of their slaughter had been the dreary, the sepulchral home of the cause they advocated. He, however, whose name they bore, whose battles they fought, enabled them to gain such conquests

over error, as have been, and will be to the end of time, an encouragement to those who suffer for his name.

It may be observed, that those whom the Holy Spirit hath pointed out in the Bible as distinguished from others by either absolute or comparative excellences, have endured very severe trials. In the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, faith and trial are placed in so close a connexion, as almost to lead us to the conclusion that believing and suffering are inseparable. Abraham, the father of the faithful ; Isaac, the child of promise ; Jacob, who wrestled and prevailed with the Angel of the covenant ; Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, were all tried. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were cast into a burning fiery furnace, because they would not worship the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Daniel, in whom was an excellent spirit, was thrown into a den of lions. The apostle Paul was called to suffer as well as to plead for Christ ; and in all his writings he teaches that those who would wear the crown must fight for it. Peter assured his brethren that there was a "needs be" for the trial of their faith, and he exhorted them to the patient endurance of all their calamities. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the

fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.

Wherein then lies the singularity of your afflictions? Are you treading an unbeaten path? Is the Almighty for the first time, teaching the world, through your trials, that the followers of his Son must be conformed to him in suffering? Are your afflictions experiments which have never been tried upon others? Does the history of the church leave you in the dark as to the nature and design of those trials by which your patience has been exercised? Are you without a companion in tribulation? Is the communion of saints a privilege from which you, the chastened of the Lord, are excluded? Why, the reverse of all this is the case. You are not alone in the furnace of affliction. Others are there; and many have been tried, not only as severely as yourselves, but precisely in the same way, and by the same means.

Are you poor? it may be well for you to read the history of the woman at Zarephath, who, though she had only a handful of meal and a little oil in a cruse, was commanded to feed Elijah the prophet. 1 Kings xvii. 1—16.

Are you sick? the touching account given by

St. John of the family of Bethany, will afford you instruction and comfort. John xi.

Are you persecuted, and then tempted to think your lot hard? You will find both rebuke and balm in the last nine verses of the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews; and also in that part of our Lord's sermon on the mount, in which he refers to persons in your circumstances, for the very purpose of describing their blessedness. Matt. v. 10—12.

Are you a widow, just returned from the grave of him you so tenderly loved, to sigh over your loss, to deplore your solitude, and to ask, "How can I, the weaker vessel, struggle with cares which brought my husband to the grave?" Do not, O do not, allow unbelief to deprive you of the comfort which the God of widows has so plentifully supplied you in his word. Naomi and Ruth her daughter-in-law were both widows, and God took care of them. Their history is a striking exemplification of the doctrine of a particular providence, and it will do you good to read it. Ruth i.—iv. The woman whom Elisha directed to borrow empty vessels of her neighbours, and who had nothing in her house save a pot of oil, was a widow, and a widow in embarrassed circumstances, too; for the creditor went to take her two sons to be bondmen: but who can doubt the interposition of Divine

goodness on her behalf? 2 Kings iv. 1—7. The time you spend in meditation and prayer over her case will not be lost. When our Lord was upon earth, a certain widow was so reduced as to have only two mites, which she cast into the treasury. Mark xii. 42. “And when Jesus came nigh to the gate of the city called Nain, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.” Luke vii. 12. The evangelist Luke has recorded for your instruction and encouragement, the pious devotions of Anna, a widow of about fourscore and four years, Luke ii. 36—38; and as a sure mode of obtaining peace for the mind, and food for the body, widows are directed to trust in the Lord. Jer. xlix. 11.

But you may be a widower, lamenting that “God hath taken away the desire of your eyes with a stroke.” Should this be the case, your trials are not singular. The sacred historian informs us that “Sarah died in Kirjath-arba, and that Abraham came to mourn for her and to weep.” Gen. xxiii. 2. Jacob lost his beloved Rachel on his way to Bethel; and before he left the place of her interment, he set a pillar upon her grave. Gen. xxxv. 19, 20.

Are you an orphan—the son or daughter of parents, one or both of whom have departed to their rest? Do not forget that Isaac lost his

mother, and Esther, the niece of Mordecai, her father and mother too. Esther ii. 5—7.

It is not improbable that some scoffer may have impugned your motives, slandered your reputation, and that your spirit, in consequence, may be deeply wounded. But this is not the first time innocence has bled, and you are not deprived of the pity and help of the God of righteousness, who defends the cause of all who trust him. “Reproach,” said David, “has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, and there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.” Psa. lxi. 20. And God hath made this promise for your support, a promise in every way suited to your circumstances—“Fear ye not the reproach of men; neither be afraid of their revilings: for the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.” Isa. li. 7, 8.

Is your body diseased? does the pain caused by it render your days and nights wearisome? If the patriarch of the land of Uz, and Hezekiah, king of Judah, could sit for an hour at your bedside, and relate their sufferings, you would not then think your own heavy. Job ii. 7, 8; Isa. xxxviii. 21.

Have you been deprived,—whether wickedly by man, or righteously by God, is not the question,—but have you lost the property which at one time enabled you to live in respectability and comfort, and which you expected would meet the necessities and minister to the gratifications of your children after your death? This must be a heavy trial, and one in which you need the presence and support, not so much of the creature, as of your Father who is in heaven. Still, your circumstances are not singular, and there is a controlling, dispensing power, which, to be peaceful and happy, you must recognise and own. “The gold and the silver are the Lord’s.” Hag. ii. 8. “He giveth power to get wealth;” and he sometimes takes what he has given. Deut. viii. 18; Job i. 21. “The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and he giveth it to whomsoever he will.” Dan. iv. 17. Rachel and Leah said to Jacob, “Are we not counted of our father as strangers? for he hath sold us; and hath quite devoured also our money.” Gen. xxxi. 15. Those who are engaged in trade and commerce are liable to painful reverses. What with competition on the one hand, and with overstocked and restrained markets on the other, connected with the concealed duplicity and detected hypocrisy of those who care not how they injure others, so that they benefit

themselves, many a conscientious tradesman finds it difficult to maintain his credit, and to secure a fair remuneration for his capital and time. How strikingly applicable are the words of the wise man, to persons in these circumstances ! “For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night.” Eccl. ii. 22, 23. “It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.” Prov. xx. 14. “And as with the buyer, so with the seller, the earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof.” Isa. xxiv. 2—6.

And what if you are called to occupy some servile post, to submit even to the drudgery of life? Are not the goings of a good man ordered by the Lord? Are not the bounds of his habitation fixed? Is not he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, the Lord’s freeman? The Jews were brickmakers in Egypt. Exod. ii. 14. Jacob was Laban’s servant, and we have his own account of the character and period of his servitude. “In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy house.” Gen. xxxi. 40, 41. Joseph was a carpenter.

Matt. xiii. 55. Bezaleel and Aholiab were weavers.—Exod. xxxv. 35. Zechariah was porter of the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.—1 Chron. ix. 21. Onesimus was a slave.—Phile. Aquila and Priscilla were tent-makers.—Acts xviii. 3. Noah was a ship-builder.—Gen. vi. 14, &c. Lydia was a seller of purple.—Acts xvi. 14. David was a shepherd.—1 Sam. xvi. 11. Boaz was a farmer.—Ruth ii. 4. Peter and some other apostles were fishermen.—Matt. iv. 18, 19. Luke was a physician.—Col. iv. 14.

But time would fail us were we to attempt to enumerate all the occupations and circumstances of God's people noticed in the Bible. The few at which we have glanced are sufficient, surely to convince you that there is nothing peculiar in your condition, and that you are bound to pursue the course to which God hath called you, with a cheerful countenance and a joyful heart. Connected with the duties just adverted to, there must have been cares and disappointments such as Christian people now experience, excepting only the difference occasioned by the age of the world, and the customs and climate of the country.

Banish then for ever from your mind the impression that you are tried and exercised as none before you have ever been; and remember that "we have not an high priest which cannot be

touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Heb. ii. 18 ; iv. 15.

“ One adequate support
For the calamities of mortal life
Exists—one only ; an assured belief
That the procession of our fate, howe'er
Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
Of infinite benevolence and power ;
Whose everlasting purposes embrace
All accidents, converting them to good.
The darts of anguish *fix* not where the seat
Of suffering hath been thoroughly fortified
By acquiescence in the will supreme
For time and for eternity ; by faith,
Faith absolute in God, including hope,
And the defence that lies in boundless love
Of his perfections ; with habitual dread
Of aught unworthily conceived, and used
Impatiently, ill-done or left undone,
To the dishonour of his holy name.
Soul of our souls, and Safeguard of the world !
Sustain, thou only canst, the sick of heart ;
Restore their languid spirits, and recall
Their lost affections unto thee and thine.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE NATURE AND DESIGN OF AFFLICTIVE DISPENSATIONS.

THAT providential dispensations are afflictive, is a fact which none can deny, and which we have no wish to conceal. Let it be proclaimed upon the housetops, that God's people are "a poor and an afflicted people," and that he afflicts them. "Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground," Job v. 6; it is of God. And as the cause of truth will gain nothing by the silence of its advocates on the imperfections of good men, it certainly will not be injured by a calm consideration of the connexion which is every where observable between sin and suffering.

Most Christians can tell a tale of woe—for who is without trial? but they cannot relate their privations and sorrows, without, at the same time, bearing testimony to the love of God, and to the depravity of human nature. Their sufferings

teach the world their personal failures ; but they teach them in such a way, as to disclose no less clearly the goodness of God, than the evils with which he is displeased. The rod is often placed in his hand, and he is constrained to use it. He uses it with great care, and never wounds without healing ; but afflictive dispensations are his—they are parts of his ways, the paths in which he moves. The cloud is his chariot. Storms pioneer his course of love ; so that those Christians who trust in the dark, who hopefully wait the return of day, and who confide in the power that appears to be turned against them, are sure of comfort *in* affliction, and of the peaceable fruit of righteousness, when the affliction has passed away.

Trials may succeed trials with great rapidity, and each that follows may be heavier than the one that preceded it. It may even seem that all the waves and billows of the Lord are going over us. But as every affliction has its appointed work to do, the repetition of the same stroke, or the stroke in a varied form, proves either that the disease is inveterate, and will not easily yield to the treatment of the great Physician ; or, that our desires and prayers are so circumscribed, as to render necessary some elaborating process to prepare us to receive larger communications of his mercy. Between the first cause of the soul's

purity and health, and the means by which it is promoted, there are many co-operating circumstances which it would be impossible to overlook, and which cannot be regarded in any other light than as the methods which our gracious God employs to accomplish his will. His hand is to be seen in every affliction. Some events are appointed, others are permitted; but in either case He “who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will,” superintends the whole for the benefit of those whom he is preparing for glory. Many of our afflictions are nothing more than the results of our sin; but so great is his love, so wise are his plans, so tender is his discipline, that he converts the fruits of our folly into an agency for our improvement. “He turneth the curse into a blessing,” and by the consequences of a mistake prevents its recurrence. Through his rich mercy, we become wiser and better one year, for the slight inadvertences of the preceding one.

This remark must not be construed into a justification of *their* conduct. “who say, Let us do evil, that good may come;” and he must be a wicked man—a man hardened in sin—who makes an ill use of the facts adduced, first, to illustrate the freeness of the Divine favour, and then to console those on whom its care is bestowed. These things are written for *their* instruction in

righteousness who are anxious to do God's will and to enjoy his presence ; and they know how to turn them to the best account. Job ascribes his losses to God. Job i. 21. David said of Shimei, "Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him." 2 Sam. xvi. 10, 11.

But respecting the nature and design of the trials of God's people, we observe,

I. Afflictions are chastisements—the chastisements of a Father who loves his children too well to allow them to sin without rebuking them for it. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Heb. xii. 6. "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" Lam. iii. 39. The punishment is not arbitrary, or even judicial; "but if his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments: if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." Psa. lxxxix. 30—32. Buchanan justly remarks, "Afflictions come from God, not as the messengers of his avenging wrath, but as tokens of his paternal love; and in sending them, he acts, not as an offended Judge, awarding punishment, but as a kind and forgiving Father, meting out such discipline and correction to his children as they severally require." "Behold,

the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." Isa. lix. 1, 2. So that when we are afflicted, there should be great searchings of heart—deep, prayerful, prolonged self-examination. We should inquire, "Why hidest thou thy face, O Lord?" "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me." As the chastisement does not causelessly come, why has this evil befallen me? Wherein have I grieved the Holy Spirit? Have I dishonoured either the doctrines or the precepts of the Gospel? What form has the sin of my heart assumed,—is it pride—unbelief—ingratitude—inactivity? Am I unduly exalted? have I been distrustful? have I forgotten to thank God for his benefits? have I murmured at his dealings towards me? have I conformed to the world in its spirit and practices? O God, point out, discover to me, the cause of thy controversy, and bring me to repentance for my sins. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Psal. cxxxix. 23, 24. I have procured the trials which have brought me low. "The Lord," says Case, "bids his people

read all their sins in their punishment; and to look upon sin as a mother-evil, that hath all other evils in it; which means, thank thyself for all the affliction that is upon thee."

The tenderness of God's love requires that we should regard our afflictions as chastisements. "For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Lam. iii. 33. But he *has* afflicted us. Has he then done it against his will? No; this cannot be, for he performeth the thing that is appointed for us, Job xxiii. 14; and as his counsel must stand, so he will do all his pleasure. But it may be said, he uses the rod reluctantly. Every stroke goes to his heart; and we are almost justified in asserting, that it wounds him as deeply as it does us. The Lord was grieved for the affliction of Israel, Judg. x. 16; and he taketh pleasure in their prosperity. Psal. xxxv. 27. By calm and honest inquiry we may often find out the evil for which we are chastised; but if we cannot trace our afflictions to their precise causes, we are as sure that these causes exist, as if we could point them out with infallible certainty. Ought we not then to be mute under the smarting rod? "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." Mic. vii. 9. I have sinned as a child, and am guilty of offences which only a child can commit. My delinquency

is great. I deserve all I suffer. All, did I say? I ought rather to have said, my deserts exceed my chastisements a thousand-fold. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him." Psa. ciii. 10, 11. Lord, help me, then, meekly to bear the chidings of thy love, and to be thankful as well for the trial itself, as for the merciful circumstances attending it. "The Lord never afflicts without necessity. If you could do without sufferings, God would never lay one upon you." *

II. Afflictions are corrective in their design and tendency. They are sent to remove existing evils, to rectify mistakes, to restore harmony to a disturbed mind, to break off from us the encumbrances which have hindered our progress in the life of holiness, to mortify our lusts, to crucify our sinful and inordinate affections. "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word." Psa. cxix. 67. "Impetuous passions are restrained, and the ways of sin are embittered by affliction. When we are running from the fountain of living waters, and seeking cistern after cistern, he in mercy destroys these one after another, to cure us

of our folly. When any earthly object steals our hearts from himself, he breaks our idol before us, and makes its vanity manifest.”* Afflictions are remedies for a diseased soul. There is no virtue, no inherent power in affliction, to heal a single moral malady. Tribulation by itself is not a corrective. It often increases the mad fever of the mind. Some afflicted persons are self-willed, irritable, rebellious, angry. Like bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke, they kick and plunge most violently ; and instead of becoming more submissive, more spiritual, the discipline employed to improve their condition, becomes, through their folly and waywardness, the occasion of a more alarming developement of their depravity. Sanctified affliction, and this only, can correct the evils of our nature. Our spiritual improvement in affliction, therefore, depends upon the purifying influence of the Spirit which accompanies it ; and also, upon the experience of the truth we have during the season of trial. “Sanctify them through thy truth ; thy word is truth.” John xvii. 17. “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” John xv. 3. The church is cleansed through the washing of water by the word, Eph. v. 26 ; but our experience

* Russell.

of the word that purifies, and a reception of the grace of the Spirit which gives to the word its cleansing virtue, depends, in part, upon the manner in which we bear affliction, and the use we make of it. If we do not accept chastisement as we would any other mercy, we cannot expect that our condition will be improved by the means which the Lord employs for our advantage. In the healing process of his love, as there is on his part wise discipline, so on ours there must be cheerful acquiescence. "We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence : shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?" Heb. xii. 9.

Here we learn that subjection is essential to life; and subjection, too, not simply to the authority of a Ruler, but to the discipline of a Father. The removal of a diseased limb sometimes saves life; and whatever pain may be induced by the operation, the sufferer is thankful for it. And how frequently does our God take away what we possess, to deliver us from an evil into which we have fallen! *He* judges of the case, and he treats it wisely; and were we as anxious about the spirituality of our minds as he is, we should be as thankful for the incision that causes the wound to bleed, as for the balm that instantly soothes and eventually heals it. "Being provided for in the

covenant of grace, and made a matter of promise to the redeemed, chastisements are to be considered among the privileges of God's people."

III. Afflictions are to prevent, as well as to cure our evils. This consideration should do more than simply reconcile us to our lot; it should make us thankful, very thankful for all our trials. God knows our tendency and dispositions; and when we are about to wander where we ought not to go, by some afflictive restraint he prevents an occurrence, which, but for his interposition, he knows will happen. Baxter says that "afflictions are God's most effectual means to keep us from losing our way. Without this hedge of thorns on the right hand and on the left, we should hardly be able to keep the way to heaven." Another writer observes, "Should we in the day of trouble be unable to discover any particular transgression in which we have indulged, we ought not to question the goodness of God; for he sees the future in the present. We may not have formed and worshipped any particular idol, but he saw that we were about to do it—he saw a train of circumstances commencing, which, owing to our habits, tempers, and dispositions, would be a snare to us; and he determined to prevent the evil." Is not this kind, and kindness peculiarly his own? Notwithstanding the knowledge we have gained

by experience and observation, we are ignorant of the future ; and however practical be our wisdom, we cannot at all times guard against approaching danger. Before we suspect a snare we may be entangled, and may fall into sin at the moment we think ourselves armed against it. God's preventing goodness is therefore of incalculable value, even though its designs be accomplished "by terrible things in righteousness." The evil prevented, is always greater than the suffering preventing it. Great calamities are warded off by a gentle process ; and we can scarcely conceive how much we are indebted to God "for hedging up our way with thorns." Anticipating all events, he knows not only wherein we are likely to err, but all the designs of the devil, our great adversary. *We* are not altogether ignorant of his devices ; but as we do not, cannot, know his undeveloped plans, nor the methods he intends to employ to accomplish them, but for the foreknowledge and interposing arrangements of the Almighty Saviour, our final overthrow were all but certain. Satan's inventions are destructive ; and were they unknown to God as they are to us, he would fulfil his purpose, and devour the sheep of the Lord's pasture.

We cannot help again exclaiming, O the value of preventing mercy ! even though it assume the

form of a heavy affliction. Unseen dangers are sometimes the most perilous ; and did we know how many calamities have been averted, and how many of Satan's devices have been frustrated, by affliction, surely we should never murmur at the rod ! Trial relates no less to the future, than to the present and the past. And what a relief is this to the mind that believes it ! The support and comfort it yields are inexpressibly great ! We are in our Father's hands, and all his providential dispensations are for our benefit. We do not always perceive his designs, nor are we able to account for his procedure ; but shall we impeach his wisdom, impugn his equity, or question his goodness ? Those of his people who are the most spiritually minded, are sometimes the most heavily afflicted ; and the most active and devoted,—those who have the will and the power to glorify God upon a large scale of Christian effort, and who appear to be doing their work well, and in a right spirit, are frequently placed in circumstances which render it impossible for them to persevere in their course of active service. The death of John Williams on the shores of Erromanga, was the suspension of labours by which island after island, and tribe after tribe, had been blessed ; and the continuance of those self-denying, benevolent exertions, appeared to us

short-sighted, erring mortals, to be almost essential to the furtherance of the Gospel in those distant regions. Yet who will dare say that his departure to his rest was not a merciful dispensation, both to the church and to the world? A chastisement it was; not to him,—for a martyr's death introduced him to a martyr's crown; but to those under whose auspices he went forth a second time to fight the battles of the Lord; and it was felt and acknowledged by thousands to be a chastisement. But as chastisements are mercies to the chastised, and to those with whom the chastised have to do, might not the death of this great man have been permitted to arrest the progress of some events connected either with his movements, or with the movements of others, which, had they been allowed to progress, would have issued in disastrous consequences to that very cause for which he exposed, and in the promotion of which he lost, his existence? To judge with a righteous judgment, of an event so inscrutable as this appeared, and still appears to be, we must wait the disclosures of eternity. Jesus said to his disciples, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter," John xiii. 7; and with this communication we are satisfied, because here we have a clue to the love of Christ in the darkness of Divine providences. That Joseph should have been sold by

his brethren ; that Job should have been deprived of his property, of his family, and of his health ; that ministers of the Gospel should be removed in the meridian of their days and usefulness ; that the mother of a large family should be suddenly deprived of her husband, and be left to struggle with the cares of life alone ; that some should rise into affluence, and others, more skilful and devoted, should be scarcely able to procure the necessaries of life ; that wicked men should prosper, and that good men should know only adversity, are events about which there is thrown an impenetrable gloom. Yet, events even more mysterious than these are of daily occurrence ; and they rise and pass away not like a dream, which for a moment only disturbs the serenity of the mind, but like a hurricane, which desolates and alarms. “Thy way, O God, is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.” Psa. lxxvii. 19.

IV. But whatever may be our impressions of the mysteriousness of those events which try our faith and patience, it must be distinctly observed that mystery lies on the side of mercy. That a rebel, one who has rejected the counsel of God, should be afflicted, is no mystery ; but that the rebel should be pardoned, be restored to the Divine favour, and meetened for everlasting

communion with the Being against whom his heart has often risen in enmity—this is mysterious indeed! “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” Romans xi. 33. That he should have devised a method to recover us from our degradation; that his own Son should suffer and die in our nature to make an atonement for our sins; that the Holy Spirit should create us anew, and make our “vile bodies” his temple; that we should be vitally united to Christ, and through him have access to God as our Father and portion; that we who deserve hell with all its horrors, should be secure of heaven with all its glories,—*these, all these, are mysteries indeed!*

Yet these are facts which we cordially believe, in which we glory, and from which the spirit “draws her noblest life.” Some persons, indeed, have speculated and doubted, when their reason has been baffled; and they have had the temerity to declare their determination to believe only what they can comprehend; but simple faith credits “the record which God hath given of his Son,” and without “doubtful disputation,” admits the truth to the heart, with its life to quicken, and its power to sustain. And why should we not be as consistent—for faith is consistency, not

credulity—in relation to the means the God of love employs to accomplish his will, as we are to the great facts which that will has disclosed? As sinners, we are too much concerned for our comfort to refuse the proffered aid of mercy, even when we cannot fathom the depths of her counsels, or comprehend all her plans; why, then, should we deprive ourselves of those consolations which Divine love is always ready to administer, simply because the process of administration is somewhat obscure? Have we not more cause to wonder at the kindness of God, than at the trials of life? Especially when we remember that his love is absolutely sovereign, and that his chastisements are only so many mediums through which he designs it shall flow. In providence, viewing the calamities of life simply as they are, analogy helps us to anticipate the future, and to form a righteous judgment of the past. But in grace, so exclusively are the purposes and ways of God his own, that to reason on them analogically is “to darken counsel by words without knowledge.” From the conduct of a wise earthly parent, we may learn something of the probable discipline of our heavenly Father; in fact, the earthly is employed to illustrate the heavenly; but human affection, however strong and tender, can supply us with no data from

which we may argue the strength and tenderness of God's love. Shall we then resign ourselves, with contentment and thankfulness, to Divine grace; but debate and murmur about the ordinary trials of life, when the mystery is, not that we are troubled, but that our afflictions are so few, and that the heaviest of them are so light? Rather let us try to reach the psalmist's conclusion, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord," *Psa. xciv. 12*; and let us confess with Jeremiah, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." *Lam. iii. 27*. This is the conclusion to which truth conducts us, and this is the confession which truth demands we should make. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." *Psa. cxix. 71*. Afflicted Christians are blessed. They are blessed by affliction, and in consequence of affliction. Afflictions endear the promises, the throne of grace, the favour of God, the work of Christ, the influences of the Spirit. Light is thrown upon our path, and many a stumbling-block is removed out of our way, by sanctified affliction. The trial may be personal or relative, providential or spiritual; we may be wounded deeply, touched in the tenderest part, and driven into great straits; perilous times may come; yet it is our mercy to know that the operations of the Divine hand cannot invalidate

the truth of the Divine word. However heavily afflicted, if we are the Lord's, we are blessed, and blessed we must be. If sin be a curse, and who can doubt it? then its removal must be a blessing, for which we ought to be thankful. For besides the positive removal of evil, there is an actual increase of holiness, and of *His* holiness, too, at the recollection of whose purity we are called upon to give thanks. *Psa.* xcvi. 12. Speaking of affliction, *Isaiah* says, "This is all the fruit, to take away his sin," *Isa.* xxvii. 9; this is the work it was sent to do, the only work it has to do, and this it must do. "He afflicts us for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness," *Heb.* xii. 10; that our conformity to his image might increase; and that, as a necessary consequence, our joy might be proportionably augmented. If the old man, our nature as corrupt, be but restrained, and if the new man, the life of God in the soul, be but strengthened, we must be blessed. As our infirmities are so many, it must be good for us to be afflicted; and the withholding this salutary discipline from us would be a most direful calamity,—a calamity which, were we wise, we should dread more than death itself. We may lose our health, our friends, our property, and indeed all our earthly enjoyments; one comfort after another may be removed, till scarcely one is left to remind us of the value of those which are

gone; but the loss is nothing to our gain. By being impoverished, we are enriched, Mark x. 29, 30; out of weakness we are made strong, Heb. xi. 34; though the outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. 2 Cor. iv. 16. The gold loses its dross in the furnace, Mal. iii. 3, and out of the fire there comes forth a vessel meet for the Master's use. 2 Tim. ii. 20, 21. We lose that which is natural, we gain that which is spiritual, and great is our profit. "I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall continually be in my mouth." Psa. xxxiv. 1.

"For what shall I praise thee, my God and my King?
 For what blessings the tribute of gratitude bring?
 Shall I praise thee for pleasure, for health, or for ease?
 For the sun-shine of youth, for the garden of peace?
 Shall I praise thee for flowers that bloomed on my breast?
 For joys in prospective, and pleasures possessed?
 For the Spirit that heightened my days of delight?
 For the slumbers that sat on my pillow by night?
 For this should I thank thee; but if only for this,
 I should leave half untold the donation of bliss:
 I thank thee for sickness, for sorrow, for care,
 For the thorns I have gathered, the anguish I share,—
 For nights of anxiety, watchings, and tears,
 A present of pain, a prospective of fears!
 I thank thee, I bless thee, my King and my God,
 For the good and the evil thy hand hath bestowed!
 The flowers were sweet, but their fragrance is blown;
 They yielded no fruits, they are withered and gone!
 The thorn it was poignant, but precious to me,
 'Twas the message of mercy—it led me to thee!"

CHAPTER V.

THE FAITHFULNESS AND LOVE OF GOD MANIFESTED TO HIS AFFLICTED PEOPLE.

To err in our conceptions of God's ways is bad; to misjudge his character is worse; especially as it is impossible for us to contemplate his works with satisfaction, if our views of his perfections are erroneous. "He that cometh to God," with hope of obtaining his favour, "must believe that he is,"—that he is what he is described to be in the Bible, Heb. xi. 6; and the more scriptural are our perceptions of his nature, and of the relation he bears to his people, the more disposed shall we be to justify and to adore his procedure.

Right views of God are essential to peace of mind in any circumstances; still more so, however, when his way is in the whirlwind, and when clouds are the dust of his feet. There is then so much to try our faith, that if we do not look through the dispensation, to His intentions who orders it, we shall scarcely perceive a point on

which to rest our hopes of support and deliverance. And how can we think correctly of the Divine purposes, if we do not judge righteously of the mind and heart in which they originated? Defective knowledge is a source of innumerable evils. "In thy light shall we see light," Psa. xxxvi. 9; and by the aid of God's word and Spirit we shall be able to discern the rainbow of the covenant, arching the portentous cloud with sun-like indications of his love, and inviting us to anticipate the period, slowly it may be, but steadily advancing, when the light shall be rendered more joyous and brilliant by the gloom which preceded it. And shall we not accept the invitation? Why should we dwell upon events which are only means to an end, as if they were final terminations of some afflictive causes that had reached a crisis from which it were impossible for us to cast the eye of hope? We may encourage ourselves in the Lord our God, even when he afflicts us; and this we ought to do as much for his glory, as for our own peace. For how dishonouring to him are unbelieving thoughts of his conduct! Distrust is a reflection on his wisdom and care. Unbelief is an appeal against his decisions, and its representations of truth are distorted and false.

How important then are scriptural views of his character! And whence can these be derived but

from the Bible, which is the revelation of his will, both as to means and measures, causes and effects? We must draw instruction and derive hope from his word: but we must not consult the Scriptures with an impression that no evidence derivable from his works is to be admitted. His word explains his works, and his works confirm the truth of his word,—so that both must be consulted; and if the afflicted Christian learn the lessons taught by both, he will be assisted in his attempts to understand either. But he must do this with great docility of disposition, and with spiritual motives. If he bring a proud, rebellious spirit to the word, he cannot realise its consolations; and if he be dissatisfied with the operations of the Divine hand, a cloud will most certainly be cast upon the Divine favour. “God is his own interpreter;” and as his secret is with them that fear him, a contented mind is almost sure to be supplied with information that will enable it, if not to unriddle, yet to profit by dark dispensations. Knowledge gained in this way is most precious: it is gold to enrich, balm to heal, and power to regulate; and as affliction is a medium through which this knowledge is obtained, can we hope to possess it without some experience of the trials by which it is increased? Those whom the Holy Spirit hath taught by affliction are wise, not

only as to knowledge gained, but as to the use they make of it ; and with their impressions of the power of God's truth, they are prepared to receive his love in whatever way he may be pleased to impart it, and to bear their unwavering testimony to the equity and fidelity of his procedure. In affliction, deep lessons are taught on almost every part of revealed truth ; but on no subject is clearer light thrown, than on the character of God as a Father and a Friend. What is more important to the peace of the troubled saint than this ?

But, as we must take a more special view of the entire case, we notice,

I. The faithfulness of God—a subject of great interest to the afflicted, and one that yields strong consolation to those who rest upon it. “ I know,” said the psalmist, “ that thy judgments are right ; and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.” Psa. cxix. 75. These are the words of an afflicted Christian ; of one who knew what it was to be tried ; one who had learned to recognise the Divine hand in the most chequered dispensations, and who had been assisted to take such a view of them as afforded him hope and consolation. He knew that his trials were traceable to God ; and believing that God's ways were all righteous, the afflictions by which he was exercised were to him as

convincing a proof of his faithfulness, as were the comforts by which he was sustained under them. He was perplexed, but he did not allow his perplexities to divert his attention from the fact which his faith owned. "I know that thy judgments are right." The Lord can never be betrayed into a mistaken view of the case, or into error respecting the means employed for its correction. His ways are right, they are *all* right ; and were they understood, they would lead our minds to rest and happiness. David was reconciled to his lot ; and by a sweet consciousness that the Lord was doing for him the best thing that could be done, and was doing that thing in the best possible way, he was constrained to bless God at all times. He viewed God's mercy and love in connexion with crosses and cares, as well as with comforts and enjoyments. And ought not we to do the same ? The reasons that affected his mind under that dark economy are more intelligible, and ought therefore to be more powerful in this day of the Spirit's operations. Having both testaments before us, shall we be slow to admit what *they* so cheerfully admitted who had but one ? While the old dispensation lasted, the church was in her minority, and was fettered ; but as her sons are now free and of full age, are they not bound to walk in the light which clearer

revelations have thrown upon their path, and to take the larger cup of blessing which sovereign mercy hath placed within their reach?

The righteousness of God is seldom questioned by any one when outward comforts accumulate. If we ever arraign the Divine conduct, and doubt the tenderness of the Divine care, it is when trials increase, when earthly enjoyments diminish. No one will admit that it is always easy for the afflicted child to say, "I know that my Father is doing all things well, and I am perfectly satisfied with his ways." We are different creatures in different circumstances; and it is much less difficult to sing of mercy in sunshine, than when storms arise. Still, the Lord does not, cannot err. He is perfect in his nature, and must, therefore, by necessity, be right in his conduct. If we suffer by the positive infliction of pain, if we are deprived of the blessings we most highly value, or should we be suddenly hurled into a vortex of trouble, there cannot be unrighteousness with God. Whatever he does is consistent with himself,—with his justice as well as with his goodness, and with his goodness no less than with his justice. Our chastisements are the fruits of his love. "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies." Psa. xxv. 10. "Our

reason and feelings call nothing mercy, but what suits our ideas of things, and gratifies our feelings. When the Lord gives things that delight the senses, every mouth can say, 'The Lord is merciful.' But when he afflicts and distresses, none but those whose eyes have been anointed with eye-salve, who see the Lord ruling in heaven and earth, watching over every hair of the head, can say, 'This is nothing but mercy.' If you bear the Christian character, brother, be assured that nothing will meet you on this side death, in death, and beyond it, but mercy. When feelings are tortured, when the heart bleeds, we are ready to say, Can this be mercy? But we do not know what God intends towards us; we look at one act, God sees the whole plan; we look at one link in the chain, and this viewed alone is painful, dreadful; we wish it out. But oh! take care how you speak to God about taking this out. Were this link taken out, you might lose the whole chain of mercy. Oh! may my soul learn to leave all more quietly in the Lord's hands. What was a sore trial in the beginning, may end in everlasting joy. Yea, that very thing which tries and pains you most severely, shall make you praise and triumph most joyfully hereafter. You shall then see mercy in that particular trial." *

But we are not always left to the “hereafter” to have the history of God’s dealings with us cleared up. “I am sure I speak the sentiments of many a child of God, when I say that even under the severest pressure of affliction, even in the intensest human sorrow, he has been able to realise a Father’s hand correcting him in mercy ; and to believe that his dealings have been dictated by the most tender and compassionate love.” “It is true, without a single exception, that *all* his paths are mercy and truth to them that fear him. His love is the same when he wounds as when he heals, when he takes away as when he gives ; we have reason to thank him for *all*, but most for the severe.”* “I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right ; and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.”

Affliction itself proves this. God has never said, in any part of his word, and the word is to guide us, that he would never afflict his people, nor allow them to be afflicted. On the contrary, he has told them most distinctly that they will be tried. When *we* entered on the life of faith, and gave up our hearts to the Lord, it was with the assurance that as we had the prospect of reigning with Christ, we should have to suffer for him. We expected trial ; and have not our

anticipations been realised? has anything occurred during our pilgrimage that we were not taught to expect? Into the details of life we were mercifully prevented from entering; for had we then foreseen all that has since transpired, the prospect would have depressed, and perhaps overwhelmed us. The future was concealed by the hand that lays bare the rugged path as we have to tread it; but we were told, "no cross, no crown;" and the grace that called us to the discipleship, enabled us to acquiesce in the terms of it. We counted the cost. We received the pledge of the Saviour's love. We accepted the staff of the pilgrim and the sword of the warrior at the same time, and both have been in constant requisition. Our case, however, is not singular. Jesus said to his disciples, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." John xvi. 33. He knew what they would have to pass through, and with this intimation sounding in their ears, each trial as it came, must have convinced them of the fidelity of his love. Had their path been without a thorn, if they had never been tried, would they not have had occasion to say, either, that the Lord had deceived them, or that he had himself been deceived? Afflicted Christians always have before them one class of evidences to the faithfulness of God.

His gracious conduct to the afflicted, is another proof of his fidelity. In the first place, he never lays more upon them than he enables them to bear; and in the next, when their afflictions have done their work, they are removed. Does not this prove his faithfulness; is it anything less than the fulfilment of his promise? He has engaged to strengthen the weak, to sanctify the unclean, to chastise the rebellious, to comfort the mourner; and when he causes them to pass under the rod, and bring them, by these means, into the bond of the covenant, does he not accomplish his will concerning them? He has much to do with the afflicted, more than is generally admitted by the afflicted themselves, and much more than a passing observer would be led to suppose. By his word he speaks to them, by his Spirit he cheers them. His eye watches them. His ear is attentive to their cry. He rebukes their fears. He animates their hopes. He encourages their confidence. He shows them his covenant. He teaches them his truth. He gives them a contrite heart, and helps them to cast away the idols they have adored. The natural tendency of trial is to irritate and vex; and the heart, by plunging and fretting, which it sometimes does, has goaded itself almost to madness and desperation. No man can "endure temptation" without the help

of the Spirit ; but how peaceful is the mind over which the calming influence of redeeming love is thrown ! There may be a perfect turmoil without, yet heavenly tranquillity within. Restoring and confirming grace is often vouchsafed to the child while under the discipline that some infirmity rendered necessary ; so that instead of being forsaken, and thus given over to hardness of heart, he is melted into penitence for his sin by the very means employed to chastise him for it.

Not that affliction ever does this of itself. This it cannot do—this is beyond its province. But God sends his blessing with the trial, and converts it into a merciful and vigorous restorative. “In their affliction they will seek me early.” Hosea vi. 15. The events that awaken our fears, and which by their clear indications of God’s fatherly displeasure, lead to great searchings of heart, are so arranged and controlled, that they can neither continue too long, nor bear too heavily. “He stayeth his rough wind”—his terrible dispensations, “in the day of his east wind”—the day of his mercy in which he moderates and restrains them. Isa. xxvii. 8. When the waves beat and the billows roll, lest the little bark should be engulfed, he issues his Almighty fiat, either, “So far shalt thou come, but no farther,” or, “Be still.”

This is conclusive evidence to his faithfulness :
“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee : when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” Isa. xliii. 1, 2. With this promise we commenced our Christian course ; and has it not been fulfilled ? Sharp and severe though our trials may have been, we cannot complain. The expectations awakened by the promise have all been realised. The waters have not overflowed us ; the flames have not kindled upon us. The bush is not consumed. The bruised reed is not broken. The smoking flax has not been quenched. The Redeemer has been with us in our adversities ; and has delivered us out of many of them uninjured. Without injury, did I say ? To say this, and nothing more, would be ingratitude to him, and indifference to our own peace. We can all tell a wondrous tale about his preserving care ; for that we are not consumed, is mercy at which heaven and earth must marvel ; but to overlook the benefit, the decided, the permanent benefit, we have derived from affliction, would be a personal wrong, and an insult to Him by whom we have been blessed. “I have,” says Dr. Hope, “a strong practical belief in a particular providence, and habitually regard every event or dis-

pensation, especially chastisement, as a blessing. Remarkable circumstances in my own history, and that of my whole family, now, I hope, all brought to the Saviour's fold, have clearly taught me this."

Great indeed are the advantages derived from the rod: of some we are mindful, and "sweet affliction, sweet affliction," is the chorus of many of our songs. But we shall never know how much we are indebted to sanctified trial, till we appear in that world where trials are unknown. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Heb. xii. 11. The present is the seed-time, the future is the harvest: upon earth we suffer, in heaven we shall reign; and the rest beyond the grave will be sweetened by the toil on this side of it. "There are very few in heaven but owe their conversion, or their continuance in that state, to some stroke or other."* And with our experience of the truthfulness of the Lord's promises on our way to heaven, we can but bear our testimony to the unchangeableness of his love,—we cannot be silent on a subject so intimately connected, as this is, with his honour. "The general end of the afflictive dispensations of his providence, is the

progressive sanctification and ultimate perfection of our natures; and with this view, they are intended for our instruction, for our reproof, for our trial, and for our preparation for glory. That such is their declared purpose and use, may well serve to impress us with a sense of God's goodness even when he chastises us; while their admirable fitness, as a means to so great an end, is illustrative of the Divine wisdom which presides over our affairs." "Even the might and power of God, which naturally terrify and keep the soul at a distance, faith interprets in its own favour, and presses forward with greater alacrity. To the supreme will alone does it submit. What it does not yield to Almighty power, it concedes at once with fullest resignation to the Almighty will. Never does it venture further. It seeks not to interfere with the Divine volition; it presumes not to inquire what reasons influence, what motives actuate. Concluding that all the determinations of the Most High are, and must be, in and of themselves, immutably and eternally right, it rests in calm submission with the disappointment of its fondest wishes, the blasting of its fairest hopes, and destruction of all its present happiness, believing that the will which orders it, is and must be right."*

Let us then give thanks unto the Lord, and show forth his faithfulness. For besides the direct control He has exercised over our afflictions, thus making crooked things straight, and rough places plain ; he has been with us in our calamities, and has given us free and constant access to the resources of his infinite grace. Here, too, his faithfulness appears. When he separated us from the world and set us apart for himself, he assured us of his willingness to receive our requests, pledging his word also that he would afford us all needed counsel and help. And we have found the throne of grace on the lofty mountain, in the lowly vale, in the field of conflict, at the dawn of day, at the midnight hour. In all places, at all times, we have proved the stability of his covenant, the power of his arm, the wisdom of his counsels. All that we have felt, feared, desired, and dreaded, we have told him ; and how often has he bowed his ear and chased our fears away !

II. Affliction is designed to teach us the love, as well as the faithfulness of God. His love is perfect, free, unchanging ; it is therefore impossible that he can ever be indifferent to the happiness of those for whose salvation he sent and bruised his " dear Son." He is angry with them for their pride, carnality, selfishness, and unbelief ;

but in warring against these their sins, he proves the tenderness, as well as the reality of his friendship. If he allowed them to depart from "the fountain of living waters," without making them feel that "sin is a bitter thing," or if he did not send a messenger to bring them back, even a rough one, if necessary, where would be the evidence of his love? A rebellious child, before he repents and confesses his sin, may quail beneath the rod, and at the moment, be tempted to ask, Is this the affection I have been taught to believe my father bears toward me? But let him be humbled and sorry for his fault; let him be restored to his place in the family; let him be told of the danger to which he was exposed, and assured that into it he would have fallen, had not severe measures been employed to save him, and he will be as thankful for the frown as for the smile of his father, and will be more deeply convinced than ever that he loves him with pure, with strong affection.

And what though our fairest prospects are beclouded, our dearest comforts torn away, our sweetest moments embittered, our strongest mountains removed? are we to conclude that God hath forgotten us, that his tender mercies are clean gone for ever? If we cannot lay our finger on the precise evil which is the cause of his controversy

with us, or pursue a train of thought, leading from all that is perplexing to all that is consoling, are we to conclude that mercy is turned into wrath, that the eye that once pitied us is lighted up with indignation? Or are we to resolve the doubts that may arise in our minds about our circumstances into the arbitrary will of a despot, who enchains and oppresses at his pleasure? Judging from the fears and complaints of some Christians, we might be induced to think this was the case. But what saith the Scripture? "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Heb. xii. 6. Mark this, and mark it *well*. Those whom he loves, he chastens; those whom he receives, he scourges; and so fixed are his plans, "that if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." ver. 8.

Is there, then, anything in affliction that can legitimately lead the believer's mind away from Divine love? or is love so concealed by affliction that it cannot be seen by those whom the Lord hath tried? Is sickness, pain, poverty, persecution, the death of friends, or any other trying event, a dark shade thrown over a beautiful picture?—a cloud which neither the Sun of righteousness nor the eye of hope can penetrate? Does God ever leave his afflicted people without conclusive

evidences of his care over them? Is it not *because* he loves them, that he afflicts them? “My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: for whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth,” Prov. iii. 11, 12;—not as a father who has no affection, or whose love is feeble, but as one who takes a complacent interest in his child, and whose conduct is regulated, not by caprice or personal convenience, nor, simply by a sense of justice; but by love, and by love in its strongest, most touching forms of manifestation.

A father that delights in his son will not injure him, nor pain him unnecessarily; but if he cannot correct a mistake, or confer a benefit, without using the rod, he cannot be induced to withhold it. It goes against his nature to chastise; he does it with reluctance; and if the welfare of his child were not in jeopardy, he would rather receive a thousand blows than inflict one. The *foolish* fondness of his heart would enter a plea against the course he feels it to be his duty to pursue; but the much-loved child, the tenderly caressed one, has a powerful advocate, and he must be chastised. And the chastisement is the effort of love to accomplish its benevolent designs. It is the action of love; the weeping, the pleading, the toiling of love. It is love without a frown; love

travelling to the heart with her healing balm, with her reviving odours, with her enriching treasures. If the flock die and the olive fail, if the thorn pierce and the blast howl, it is only the voice of love inviting us to rest in Him who is the chief good; it is the discipline of love training us to habits of self-renunciation and of faith; it is the opening up to our view the deep-seated affection of our God and Saviour. When creatures are given us richly to enjoy, the Lord is indeed kind; and so long as they are used as mediums of communion with his goodness and are employed for his honour, we may be safely trusted with them: but when they occupy the place of the Giver, become his substitutes, and draw the heart away from his sovereign favour, their removal is almost certain. And who would complain, under such circumstances, of being deprived of them? Is not the Giver of all gifts better than the gifts themselves? The nearer we come to "the fountain of life," the more powerfully will its purifying and refreshing streams gush into our souls. God's heart is so set upon the substantial felicity of his people, that he will not allow them to depart from him, without correcting them for their folly. "His loving-kindness he will not utterly take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail," Psa. lxxxix. 33; and when they are brought to

repentance for their fault, he will receive them graciously. Hos. xiv. 1—4. Love is attractive, even when her garb is repulsive; and her soft whispers find their way to the ear amid the roar of hurricanes. When we are made to feel the power, to acknowledge the wisdom, to adore the designs of love, our spirits must be calm, and our enjoyments deep. If we are sheltered in the asylum, sustained by the arm, and cheered by the smile of Divine love, we cannot be otherwise than safe and happy. And the trial that most alarms us, is designed to drive us to the refuge and to introduce us to the sunshine of love. There are discoveries of God's goodness which can be made only in dark and trying dispensations; and by whatsoever means we are either prevented from going astray, or are restored after we have strayed, it is an expression of love so explicit, so tender, that it cannot be misunderstood, and ought not to be unheeded. The shading of a beautiful picture is thrown into the back-ground, for the purpose of giving prominence to the principal object of the scene. And as the glow-worm attracts its mate by the lustre it emits, when day has passed and night is come, so the suffering church of Christ, like this little winged insect, is illumined and drawn by the love that the night of sorrow hath disclosed. "Whatsoever doth make manifest is

light." And shall we regret the o'ercasting of the shadows that hide from our view objects of sense, only that they may make manifest the glorious beauty and love of Him whom angels adore? Is the departure of an earthly comfort to be regretted, when its absence leaves the mind more free to converse with Him who is our light and salvation? The *dawn* of his love is brighter and more to be desired than the meridian of that day into which the most dazzling of earthly glories can be thrown. How tender then is the kindness of Jesus to his people, when he weans their hearts from the world, and by this process, makes them more completely his temple and his throne!

"None may refuse the cup his wisdom mixeth."

Afflicted Christian, can you say with good Mr. Venn, "I love the rod; how gentle are the strokes I receive; how severe those I deserve!"? If you can, your trials have already done you much good; but if there be any misgiving in your mind as to the wisdom and kindness of God's procedure, you at once shut the heart against all the comforts of his Spirit, and open it to every foe that may choose to enter. One hard thought of Christ is quite enough to drive back the tide of his love, and to exclude the light of his truth. If you

think of his favour and friendship only in connexion with a smooth path, a thornless pillow, a cloudless sky, you have yet to learn the elementary principles of a life of faith. Lose no time, then, not even a moment, in beseeching the "good Spirit" to correct your mistakes, and to give you a wiser understanding. You need not covet trial, nor ask God to send the storm that hath gathered around many of his children. Afflictions will come, without your effort to procure them; and if the gracious Saviour, who orders all the events of his church, has hitherto led you "beside the still waters," thank him for his kindness; accept, through the mild and pleasant mediums of his mercy, all that he bestows; taking care, at the same time, to use his gifts as helps, not converting them into hinderances to your fellowship with the goodness whence they all proceed; and entreat him so to discipline your mind to think, and your heart to judge, that in the lowering tempest you may have a vivid consciousness of his gracious care. "The Lord is good," and good you will find him to be in all circumstances; but to enjoy anything like settled peace, you must be satisfied with his procedure. "It is a sweet relief to believe that whatever happens is a part of his wise and merciful discipline; and blessed are they who though they do not see how a trial is to

terminate, yet believe that all is well.”* “My times are in thy hands ;” my Father has my best interests at heart, and with him I am content to leave all causes and all consequences. He knows what is best for me, and what will do me good, and he acts accordingly. To him it is my privilege to refer all my difficulties, doubts, and trials ; and I never use this privilege but I am blessed. He assures me that all things are for the sake of those that love him ; and I, having a humble hope in his mercy, am entitled to the consolation which so precious a truth as this is intended to impart. Why then should I not take it ? It cannot be presumption to do so. I will, therefore, depending on his grace, cast all my care upon him, and receive his favour through whatever channel it may flow. It is my desire to follow him whithersoever he leads. “I will trust, and not be afraid.” If he pain me, or permit others to pain me, if he only teach me the tenderness of his love, and the sympathy of his heart, my gain will be great indeed. “O let us then commit to a Saviour’s disposal the arrangements of all the events of life, and receive from his hands, without one rebellious murmur, and drink without one repining tear, yea, even with a thankful smile, the bitterest cup he

* Mrs. Duncan.

may be pleased to prepare and present. The most afflictive of his dispensations emanate as directly from his love, as those apparently kinder appointments, by which, when compatible with our eternal welfare, he crowns our earthly hopes with the largest measure of purified earthly enjoyments.”*

“ In trouble and in grief, O Lord,
Thy smile hath cheered my way ;
And joy hath budded from each thorn
Which round my footsteps lay.

The oak strikes deeper, as its boughs
By furious blasts are driven ;
So life’s vicissitudes the more
Have fixed my hopes on heaven.

Then, gracious Lord, whate’er my lot
In future times may be ;
I’ll welcome still the heaviest grief
That brings me near to thee.”

* Family of Bethany.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EFFECT OF AFFLICTION ON THE IMPATIENT CHRISTIAN A PROOF OF ITS NECESSITY.

WHAT effect have the trials of life upon us? We know that God's intentions are gracious, and that sanctified affliction promotes the growth and stability of spiritual religion. But the inquiry now made relates not to the remote results of a trial which has yielded "the peaceable fruit of righteousness;" but to the state of mind induced by the discipline of the Holy Spirit while the purifying process is going on. The purpose of God is one thing, the disposition of the heart he seeks to benefit is another. In all our afflictions, even in the most severe of them, we ought to be contented, humble, believing, and thankful. But do we always, and at once, take the direction which the training influence of the Divine Spirit is intended to give? "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be

my disciples. Every branch in me that beareth fruit he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." John xv. 1—3.

Tried believers are sometimes rebellious, discontented, unbelieving, and distrustful. Like a lion in a net, they plunge and fret so violently, as almost to drive away the good Spirit from their hearts. And when they are apparently quiet, when there is nothing resembling an outbreak, there may be, and we fear often is, sullenness, despondency, and dissatisfaction, the elements of an angry mind. The call to prayer is not regarded, the invitation to rest in God's love is not accepted, there are but few desires to enjoy the Saviour's presence, and because suffering has come, consolation is refused. If I were not *thus* tried, reasons the murmuring Christian, I might be joyous and thankful ; but I am deeply wounded ; the Almighty hath touched me in a very tender part ; those mercies I can least spare are taken away, while those I do not highly value remain ; all these things are against me ; surely my ruin is nearly certain. Calamity after calamity has befallen me. Wave has succeeded wave ; still the storm is raging. Go where I will, trouble follows me ; the Comforter is far away ; I sit as a sparrow alone on the housetop ; almost every door is closed against me ; I am desolate—undone !

And is it in this way that you accept chastisement? Is this the spirit in which you meet trial? In such a state of mind, how can you be peaceful? You are accumulating the woes you are so anxious should be diminished, and are hourly making the road rougher, and the cup more bitter to your taste. This must surely convince you that all your trials are needful; that though you complain of them, they cannot be dispensed with; and that their removal, just now, would be an injury, not a benefit. If you cannot bear adversity in a better spirit, what reason have you, can you have, for believing that you could bear prosperity? Your rebellion might cease with the affliction that occasioned it; but another evil would arise, and perhaps a more deadly one, to take its place. Jeshurun kicked when he waxed fat. Deut. xxxii. 15. When Israel had his desire, leanness entered into his soul. Psa. cvi. 15. And a heart in such a state as yours is sure to take advantage of lenient measures. If trial has not humbled you, its removal would most certainly tend to make you more vain. With all your seeming gloominess and oppression, there is a selfish buoyancy about you, a daring kind of elasticity, which, but for the restraining influence of your trials, would carry you beyond all bounds. If you were not brought low by affliction, you would rise above

your level, and, in all probability, fall with broken bones just by the dragon's den.

To you, therefore, afflictions are indeed blessings, and you ought to adore the love that hath sent them. But at present you are not disposed to do this ; and the object of these statements and appeals is to convince you that no stronger proof can be adduced of the necessity of your being tried, than that which your own state of mind at this moment supplies. By the temper you have shown, some affecting disclosures are made, over which, but for your benefit, charity might throw her mantle. They must not, however, be concealed ; and you are earnestly entreated to consider the state of which they are the indications.

I. The effect of your trials teaches you the weakness of your faith. You cannot trust God in the dark, or when all things appear to be against you. Were your circumstances less perplexing, were your trials fewer, you imagine you could, with confidence, rely upon his word ; and that it would be easy for you to believe he was guiding you by the skilfulness of his hand. That is, for this is the meaning of it, you can trust him when the smile of his providential care rests upon your tabernacle, when scenes of joyous festivity gladden your heart, and the hearts of those with whom you are in fellowship ; but you

cannot resign yourselves and your circumstances to his guidance and protection, unless you see, not only the way in which you are led, but the end to which it leads.

Is this *your* faith? Is this all that faith enables you to do? Is yours a faith for the pilgrim who travels only by day; a faith for smooth waters; for a paradise, not for a desert; for a soldier in the garrison, rather than for the brave warrior in the field? Is your faith to be feeble, almost useless, and is the exercise of it to cease, simply because you are afflicted? Are you to be unthankful for the mercies you have, and have had, only because those that you think you want are withholden? Is the love of Christ, as it flows in one direction, to be unheeded, because it does not flow in another, or rather because you cannot trace it in another? Abraham, in one of his sharp trials, was strong in faith, giving glory to God. Job said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Should he strike and wound me, he shall yet have my heart and my confidence—I will welcome the cross he sends, lie down to receive the blow he intends to give; and when he has smitten my person and blasted my heritage, I will rise up to adore his wisdom; the heart he has wounded shall be placed under his care to be healed; the more painfully he chastises *me*, the

more confidently will I hope in *him*. And the church, amid perils and dangers of no ordinary kind, exclaimed, "I will trust, and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." Isa. xii. 2.

But where, doubting, fearful believer, is your faith, and where its fruit? You appear determined to walk by sight, if you walk at all; and when you cannot see your way, to lie down in despondency. No one doubts the perplexity of your circumstances. But why should you close your heart against the promises, because of the obscurity which hangs about providences? The word of God is immutable; and this fact, when admitted, is a source of "strong consolation." If at any time you need the counsel and support of revealed truth, is it not when almost every thing besides the truth is gone? Divine truth never fails. "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." Isa. xl. 6, 8.

But to be cheered and sustained by the truth, it must be believed. "According to your faith, be it unto you." If the truth of the promise be doubted, or the love of the Promiser be questioned,

the lamp of life becomes but a faint glimmering taper, scarcely discernible amid the surrounding darkness, and quite insufficient to point out the path of safety or of comfort. To walk in the light, the truth must be admitted to the heart, with great cordiality; and that there may be the inward witness of the Spirit, as well as the outward record of his care, there must be faith in his testimony. Of what use is the word, if its veracity and power are made to depend on propitious circumstances? In that case, it would leave unhealed the wounded spirit, and be the companion of those only to whom a full measure of earthly joy is administered. But are the poor, the sick, the persecuted, and other classes of God's afflicted ones, to be deprived of the living comforts which spring from the oracles of eternal truth? To a man without care, altogether free from trouble, half of the Bible must be a blank. It was written, in great part, for the suffering disciples of a Master who was himself a sufferer, and who has left a measure of his sufferings to be filled up by each of his followers. Sanctified trials, though they often require to be interpreted by the truth, are themselves some of the best expositors of the truth; and where the inexperienced stumble and marvel, the afflicted, whom chastise-

ments have humbled and sanctified, repose and rejoice.

How feeble must be the confidence—scarcely deserving the name—of the man, who, though of all men the most necessitous, is the least disposed to receive help, and that, for no other reason, because help is proffered in adversity! With all his cares, he might be calm, and even happy; but he will not be either, because it is the will of God he should be disciplined to this state of mind by the trials of life. Unhappy, foolish man! for shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Is it not your privilege to commit your way, with all its difficulties, to him, that thus relieved of unnecessary perplexities, you may be free to commune with his love? This is your privilege, but you do not use it; and you neglect it when you most require the grace it is intended to impart. The trials of which you complain, and which occasion you so much distress, may be bitter, and heavy; but the weakness of your faith is a proof of their necessity. “If need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” 1 Pet. i. 6, 7.

II. From the effect of affliction upon your mind, you learn, also, the little real acquaintance you have with God and with your own heart. The Lord knows what you do not, cannot know, of the heart; and as he has not concealed, but disclosed, its depravity, so also he has revealed a remedy for its maladies, together with directions for applying it. He has, too, described the process of cure, and has clearly marked the indications of returning moral health. Nor has he left the nature and design of his discipline in so much obscurity, as to render it impossible for an afflicted Christian to ascertain the relation his trials bear to the truths of the Bible, and to the sorrow of those who believe them. On the contrary, he has supplied us with much important information on every point connected with the safety and improved felicity of our souls; and did we but understand the historical records of his wondrous works, and feel that there were some interesting though affecting points of agreement between our hearts and circumstances, and the hearts and circumstances of those who in prophetic and apostolic times were afflicted, we should at once perceive that we must either admit the mercy of God in our case, trying though it be, or deny the righteousness of his procedure in theirs. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written

for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope," Rom. xv. 4; and comfort and hope we shall have, in the heaviest affliction, when patience, through the power of the word, has her perfect work.

A meek, quiet spirit, is in the sight of God of great price; and his estimate of it is the highest when its quietude is preserved amidst afflictive circumstances. "For what glory is it, if when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." 1 Pet. ii. 20. He delights to bless and honour those who confide in his care, and who thankfully accept the chastisement he deems it necessary to inflict. He is then glorified; and the purifying process of his love, justifies the adoption of the measures employed by his wisdom to establish the heart in a knowledge of his character and designs. But if the necessity of his discipline be denied or even questioned, is it not a reflection on his plans; and such a reflection as would seem rather to commend, than to condemn, those who strive against their Maker? If there be no evil in the heart, nor any evil requiring the curb, then, when God afflicts, what shall be said of his knowledge? that it is perfect?—of his calculations? that no error has been committed?

Why, the reasonings of this case would conduct us to the very opposite conclusion. Yet such a decision we cannot, we dare not adopt. The prophet exclaimed, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." Mic. vii. 9. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." Psa. li. 4.

These confessions indicate spiritual perceptions of the evil of sin, and contrition on its account. But *you* know so little about your own heart as to think it does not require the discipline which God employs. You know so little, too, about Christ, as to imagine he has misjudged your case, and needs to be told the course he ought to pursue toward you. What, has it come to this, that after all the culture bestowed upon you, none of your principles are in anything like a matured state? It is a mercy to be a Christian, even a babe in Christ; but *slow* progress in the Divine life is your dishonour. "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." Heb. v. 12. "What could have been

done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" Isa. v. 4. How evident it is that you are not in a state of mind to be trusted with the ease and outward prosperity which you desire!

III. Another thing is also certain, that, at present, you are ill prepared to struggle with great trials. "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan?" Jer. xii. 5. The circumstance that vexes you now may be a trifle, a *mere* trifle, scarcely worth a thought: and if you cannot bear this—if this light burden is a heavy load under which you stagger like a drunken man—if slight inconveniences vex you so deeply,—how will you bear up under the more seriously afflictive dispensations which may come upon you? We do not forget the promise, and we shall be glad if you remember it, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be," Deut. xxxiii. 25; but as God trains his people by suffering to suffer, and by one affliction prepares them for another, and a heavier; if you cannot wade the rivulet, how can you hope to stem the torrent?

If you are so fearful where no fear is ; when you pass from the lake, only gently agitated, to the angry ocean, what will you do then ? If you cannot trust the Pilot within sight of the shore, is it at all likely that you will trust him in deep waters, and at the midnight hour ? “ Tribulation,” says the apostle, “ worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope.” Rom. v. 4, 5. But the increase of your trials so diminishes your power to bear them, that there is but little hope of your rejoicing when you fall into temptations, and into divers of them. Judging from your state of mind, it would seem that tribulation was only an inlet to sorrow, and the occasion of fear ; and that none could reasonably expect to be confident but those only who were altogether free from care.

But this is one of those serious mistakes which those believers make who overlook the kind designs of their most merciful God, except when his ways comport with their wishes. And is not this an error, a grievous error—an evil which calls loudly for the rod, and for the remedy which the rod is generally employed to administer ? Is it at all likely that this moral mischief will yield to any other mode of treatment ? The suspension of the trial which has occasioned its appearance, would do nothing towards the removal of the evil itself.

It would still exist, though perhaps, in another form ; yea, it would gather strength, and the very next time the heart was thwarted, it would rear its head with more power than ever. It must be weakened and restrained, or God will be dishonoured, and the soul exposed to a more fearful calamity. Sanctified trials enfeeble the old man and strengthen the new. But if you will not accept sanctifying grace because of the medium through which it flows, you may expect that God will employ some severer process, first to wear down pride and unbelief—the ruggedness, the deformity of our nature,—and then to educe a more perfect representation of his own image in its beauty and purity. The Spirit does allure his people into a submissive, happy state of mind ; but when through their carnality they are too inert to be drawn, he employs means by which they may be driven.

So long, then, as the yoke galls, it proves that we are not reconciled to His ways who calls us to wear it ; and until we can say, “The will of the Lord,” not mine, “be done,” we shall require the unremitting discipline of his chastising rod. We may need it afterwards, we shall certainly need it till then ; and we ought to be thankful for it, as for one of our most precious blessings.

“I bless that God, who from above,
This needful call has sent ;
Who weans me from terrestrial love,
By gentle chastisement.

Let suffering work the end designed,
Nor let one thought repine ;
Teach me to feel thy chastening kind,
To love thy discipline.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE HARMONY BETWEEN THE PURPOSES OF GOD AND AFFLICTIVE DISPENSATIONS.

THE unity of the Divine procedure is as obvious a truth as the unity of the Godhead. His purposes are many, but they comprehend one vast whole, and secure one important end. His movements are regulated by principles of eternal rectitude. Whatever he does is right, and is consistent with his nature and word. He is a Being of intelligence, of boundless benevolence, of inconceivable love; and having an object to attain, the result of his own good pleasure, he pursues it by methods which his wisdom appoints and his goodness approves. That he accomplishes his plans in the best way, is certain; and this is a proof of the reasonableness of his procedure. Sometimes there is an apparent disagreement between his word and his works—providence seems to clash, or as if it would clash, with the promise; and the facts of life not unfrequently disturb our faith in those

solemn realities which lie at the foundation of our hope. By the promise we are taught to expect peace, and we look for it; but behold bitterness cometh, and we are disappointed. Promises encourage and delight us, whereas dark and mysterious providences arise to discourage and distress us. Still, the disagreement is only apparent, not real; and when we see, not through a glass darkly, as we now do, but face to face, we shall look upon the right side of the tapestry, and every discernible object will contribute to the harmony and beauty of the entire scene.

The will of God is one—immutable and gracious; and though the aspects in which we are called to contemplate it may be opposite and various, if we rejoice in one of the Divine volitions, we ought to rejoice in all. Man alters, but God changes not. Just what he is to his people to-day, that he will be to them to-morrow, the day after, and for ever; and the purpose in which their salvation originated is not more gracious, than is the providence by which it is accomplished. I mean, that viewing his grace, as it is revealed in the gospel, and his righteous acts, as they appear in providence—as parts of his ways—when he goes forth to bless man, we have no more reason to complain of the works of his hand, than of the dispositions of his heart. His afflictive dispensations are coincident

with his gracious counsels. One part of his procedure, therefore, is as righteous as another. "Our circumstances may frequently resemble those of the patriarch Jacob: to us the dispensations of providence may sometimes be as dark and as perplexing as they were at that time to him; and when one unexpected calamity after another befalls us, our faith, like his, may be ready to fail, so that in the bitterness of sorrow and disappointment, we may be apt to exclaim, 'All these things are against me.' But let us learn the lesson which the subsequent experience of Jacob is fitted to teach, and we shall be fore-armed against this temptation; let us reflect on the fact that the very events which to him appeared the most threatening and adverse, were in reality the appointed means of working out for him and his family a gracious deliverance; and let us rest assured that God is still faithful to his promise; that however unpromising the aspect of providence may sometimes be, God is working unseen for the accomplishment of his own purpose, and that as Jacob had, so we too shall have reason to acknowledge in the end, that 'he hath done all things well.' A rash and premature judgment of God in his providence, as it is presumptuous, so it is sure to be erroneous, and the occasion of much misery. Providence is like a vast machine, in which there

are many wheels, some of which seem to be moving in one direction, others in the opposite; and if we fasten our eye upon one wheel only, we cannot see how the end can be gained; it may seem to move contrary to the design; but it is by a combination that it works; the whole must be viewed together, if we would see the wisdom of the contrivance, or we must wait for the accomplishment of the work, if we would judge of the fitness of the means. Even so providence has many wheels, but *all* are working ‘together for good to them that love God.’ ”

I. Let us then glance at the purposes of God, and at some of the reasons we have for rejoicing in them.

That God does purpose, is certain. No believer in revelation can deny this. The sacred writers show that nations, families, and individuals all owe much to the purposes of the God who governs them; and that the salvation of men is the fruit of his sovereign purpose. “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began.” 2 Tim. i. 9. In the nature of things it is impossible that he should decree an evil. All his determinations—his positive decrees—have good for their object, unmixed

good. He cannot act contrary to his perfections. He is under no obligation to decree the deliverance of any sinner from the misery which his transgressions have entailed upon him ; but he is bound by the laws of his own existence so to purpose, and so to act, as to secure the introduction of those events which will promote his own glory. Christ came down from heaven not to do his own will, but the will of Him that sent him. “And of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.” His will, therefore, must bear a benevolent, a gracious aspect, toward the children of men. It is the sole cause of all the spiritual good which they enjoy in time and eternity ; and, when understood, it is always attractive, never repulsive. It centres in Christ. Salvation is its object. It is the fountain from which have flowed all the streams of life and purity that have ever enlivened and sanctified our fallen world. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ : According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love.” Eph. i. 3, 4. “Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate,

them he also called : and whom he called, them he also justified : and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Rom. viii. 29, 30.

The terms "Election" and "Predestination," fall harshly upon the ears of some, who, nevertheless, are themselves the very proofs of the truth they will not, or are afraid, to admit. But their denial of a fact is not its annihilation ; nor are evasive reasonings conclusive arguments. Salvation originated with God, or with man ; and it must be ascribed either to the Creator, or to the creature. "If by grace, then is it no more of works : otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace : otherwise work is no more work." Rom. xi. 6. "And we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." 2 Thess. ii. 13. Deliverance from the guilt of sin, restoration to the Divine image and to the enjoyment of the Divine favour and friendship, both in this world and in the next, are the fruits of God's sovereign purpose. He gives both grace and glory ; and the glory he gives beyond time, is only the manifestation of the grace he gave before time began. But for their having been chosen to salvation, none of the children of

men would ever seek, would ever obtain salvation. "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life." "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." As to its nature, grace is free ; as to its influence, it is efficacious ; and viewed, both as devising and operating, it may be considered as the gift of love unmerited, and the action of love uncaused. God loved man, because it seemed good in his sight to do so ; and the clustering blessings of the everlasting covenant flow from a purpose to which love gave birth,—a purpose from which proceeds "the river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God."

Now, can this representation of truth offend or distress any one ? Humble us it may, and must ; but are we, can we be, displeased with it ? In God's will, as revealed in the Bible, and with this only have we to do, there is love—only love. We are lost, and we know it—deserve to die, and we feel it ; and if we are not saved by grace, we must perish. Shall we, then, be afraid of the moving cause of our salvation and felicity ? Had not God purposed to save us, hell must have been our portion. But we *are* delivered from death ; we *have* a blessed hope of heaven. How much are we indebted to the good-will of Him who delighteth in mercy ! Of this will we ought not to think

“without transports of joy:” of this will we ought not to speak “without shouts of praise.” Not to adore it, is ingratitude. Not to rejoice in it, is insensibility. Not to ascribe our salvation to it, is sin.

II. Let us now glance at the afflictive dispensations of Divine providence.

But you must retain the impressions you have received of the will of God—of that will to which you owe your life, your peace, your all. If these are effaced, you will not be able to judge righteously of the nature and design of your afflictions. Trials are mercies. Mercies are God’s gifts. In connexion with thoughts of glory, your contemplations of the will of God are delightful ; and you may well rejoice in the purpose that secures you a throne and a crown in heaven. But you can scarcely think, for a moment, of his will in connexion with cares and trials, without sorrowing. At the throne of grace, at the cross of Christ, at the Lord’s supper, in the possession of “the peace which passeth all understanding,” God’s will appears to you most lovely ; but in the furnace of affliction you look at it with another eye, through another medium, and are sometimes disposed to murmur at its decisions.

Allow me to ask, and to press for an answer, are there two wills in the one living and true God ?

or can he will direct opposites? His will is, and must be, one. The relations it bears to us are sometimes mysteriously awful, and so various as to perplex the mind that has explored many a dark maze. But it is one will, gracious and faithful, notwithstanding the obscure developements of it, which try our faith. Are there reasons why *pardoned sinners* should rejoice in it? Then why may not *afflicted Christians* rejoice in it? It is good, unchangeably good; and good to the believer who is brought into deep adversity. The outward forms of its manifestations are but of little moment, compared with the simplicity and unchangeableness of its nature. It is seen in the covenant of grace, in the glorious gospel, in the statutes of the great King; and this view of it is most refreshing. We may see it also in the tribulation of the Christian, and it is no less gracious when it speaks in the furnace, than when it smiles in the promise. The purpose we love, is often brought to pass by the trial we dread; and the fulfilment of the Lord's good pleasure, by what means soever accomplished, is an event of joyful interest to our souls. If apart from the Divine will we can have no hope, then, but for its accomplishment, we should have no consolation. That the Lord is in every storm is our mercy; that he overrules every trial for our benefit is a still greater mercy. "I

felt the will of my God," said Mrs. Fletcher, "like unto a soft pillow, upon which I could lie down, and find rest and safety in all circumstances. Oh ! it is a blessed thing to sink into the will of God in all things. Absolute resignation to the Divine will baffles a thousand temptations, and confidence in our Saviour carries us sweetly through a thousand trials."

We do not say that all trials are decreed, or that no affliction comes upon us but that which results from positive necessity. But as God has made an everlasting covenant with his people, ordered in all things and sure, we must not so separate affliction from his purpose, as to sever the tried believer from that chain of causes which links the mind that weeps to the hand that wipes away the tear. That some afflictions are permitted, not appointed, is certain ; but whether we speak of the Lord's will as determining what shall happen, or as allowing what it does not appoint, we must recognise the arranging and controlling love of Him "who sitteth upon the flood, and who is mightier than many waters." If there were the slightest grounds for believing that any one of our many trials was an event with which God had nothing to do, about the issues of which he was not at all concerned, we can scarcely conceive what the effect on our minds would be ; for who

then would have anything like an assured hope of coming out of the fire unhurt? We are not, however, driven to this dilemma. "Affliction cometh not forth of the dust; neither doth trouble spring out of the ground." Job v. 6.

It will perhaps be said, We do not murmur at the thing done; we only complain of the *way* in which it is done. Well, but none of us could devise a better method, nor so good, as that which the Lord adopts. The method is as wise as the purpose is gracious; and as the love of the purpose is thrown into the wisdom of the method, his plans—all of them—must be mediums of mercy to the heart in which he seeks to dwell. His will is love,—love devising methods to enrich and bless its objects. And out of love nothing can arise to injure any one. "That cannot hurt which comes from thee," O Lord; it must bless. It comes from the heart of love with messages the most cheering and important—with intimations the most refreshing. Be it what it may, a cross or a comfort, a care or a joy, it bears the marks of a Father's hand. It is a witness of the deep, abiding concern he takes in our welfare. It speaks of the tenderness of his compassion, and of the thoughtfulness of his mind about our weaknesses and infirmities, and of the best means of correcting them.

Further—his will is decisive. The thing he determines to do, he does. He never spares the rod for the crying of the child ; nor does he allow any of its petulant tempers or foolish desires to influence his conduct. He has determined to do the child good, both for time and eternity ; and by the chastisement of one day he increases the happiness of the next. He makes crosses the means of augmenting comforts. By the cares and anxieties of the desert, he endears the home to which it leads. By labour, he sweetens rest ; and by the perils of conflict, teaches us to set a high value on the spoils of conquest. When brought low, he helps us ; and by the aid he affords us in one emergency, he secures our confidence in his care when others arise. The rugged mountain to be ascended, the deep river to be crossed, the trying provocation to be endured, do sometimes awaken fear, and induce discontentment ; but as peace is the believer's portion, and as the name of the Lord is his refuge, none of these things should be allowed to disquiet his soul, even for a moment. They do, we know they do, trouble it greatly ; but beyond the effects, the humbling, purifying effects, which they are designed to produce, the distress is a departure from the Lord's will, not its accomplishment ;—yea, it is man's will in opposition to God's. We

must learn to distinguish between the Lord's intentions and the dispositions of his people, and take care not to ascribe to his government the evils which it is intended to suppress. The unbelief, the rebellion, the dissatisfaction of the heart, are the insurrections, the outbreaks, which his discipline is designed to quell; and the lusting of the flesh against the Spirit is resistance to his authority, which, if not withdrawn at the admonition of a gentle chastisement, will be rebuked by some awful visitation of his displeasure. Sin against his law is a crime deserving punishment. But what shall we say of sin against his love? This is crime of deeper dye, deserving punishment in its severest forms.

And what is the afflicted Christian's discontentment? What *are* the murmurs of his soul, which enter a kind of angry protest against God's decisions, but sins against the love that seeks his benefit? and against that love, too, after the most costly proofs have been given of its disinterestedness and beneficence? The love of God is pleading, enriching love—love so great as to require the advent and death of Christ to show it forth; yet against this love we rebel, this love we wound, when we yield not to His will, who afflicts us for our profit.

III. We must now advert to the design of

sanctified affliction, that we may see how it harmonises with the will of God.

Afflictions and the purposes of God lead to the same point ; they are, so to speak, parallels ; and he who traces either, or both, will find his way to the pasture where the Shepherd feeds his flock, and where he causeth them to lie down at noon. It is through much tribulation that we must enter the kingdom which God hath prepared for those that love him ; and the way to peace and rest here lies through the wilderness : nor can we hope to repose in conscious security, amid the delights which fellowship with God occasions, unless we travel towards the promised land with a contented, thankful mind. The path, as we have already seen, is not a new, an untried one. Every step of it has been consecrated by the tears and prayers of many a pilgrim, as he has moved on alone, or in company with others. And what though it be still rugged, though there are parts of it on which the light of day seldom shines, it is *the* path that has led thousands to rest, and the one which all must tread who hope to reach the "better country." It is, however, a safe path ; and when we reach home, and have had time to review our pilgrimage, we shall clearly see, and thankfully acknowledge, the simplicity of God's plans and the harmony of his designs.

Infidelity may doubt this. But why should we *now* deprive ourselves of those sources of consolation, which we are assured will *then* be causes of joy? As we know that when the journey of life is completed, and the goal is reached, we shall confess, "he hath led us by a right way," why should not our anticipated satisfaction with God's will be to us a real comfort, even though the process of its operations be very trying? In the assurance that all will be well at last, and that what we know not now, we shall know hereafter, are to be found the elements of a peaceful mind, and the foretaste of *their* felicity from whom all shadows have passed away, and upon whose judgment there resteth not even the shade of an error. Are we the Lord's sanctified ones? then why do we not rest in his will? Having entered into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, why should we not throw into our calculations, into our estimate of his conduct, the intelligence and love which we have gained by our citizenship in heaven? For this, were it done, would so balance the mind, as to enable us to judge righteously of God, and of those dispensations which we now so erroneously interpret.

God wills our salvation; and salvation is the design of our afflictions. Must there not, then, be perfect harmony between the purpose and the providence of God? He afflicted the Jews to do

them good at their latter end ; and at the end they saw that by their afflictions they had been saved from evils, in which, but for their trials, they would have perished. “ Many are the afflictions of the righteous ; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.” Psa. xxxiv. 19. As the metal is purified in the fire, so by fiery trials the iniquity of the heart is purged, and we come out of the furnace not injured, but benefited, by the afflictions we have passed through.

When we speak of salvation in connexion with God’s purpose, we wish to be understood as referring to repentance for sin, to faith in the blood of Christ, to the subjection of the will to his authority, to personal consecration to his service, to spirituality of mind, to deep humility, to a spirit of prayer, and to the sanctification of the whole man. This—yes, this is salvation ; the salvation of the soul in time, and the earnest of glory, the complete salvation of the body, soul, and spirit in heaven.

And affliction is employed to bring all this to pass. Ephraim and Judah were stirred up to seek God by affliction. By affliction the sons of Levi were purged. The faith of Daniel in God’s promise was confirmed by affliction. Paul was joyful in all his tribulation, because of the peaceable fruit of righteousness which it yielded. Peter

and John were imprisoned, doubtless to their discomfort ; but they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. The king of Judah was so convinced of the utility of afflictions, that, after describing his own he said, “O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these is the life of my spirit.” And the apostle knew so well the necessity and design of affliction, that he said, “If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons ; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not ? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.”

To take a right view of affliction, then, it must be considered in connexion with spirituality of mind, with maturity of Christian character, and with the joys of heaven. Glory is desired by the godly ; and the godly ; by the aid of sanctified trial, approximate to the purity and felicity of the glorified. They are here taught the anthem they will sing when mortality is swallowed up of life ; and the experience of God’s love which they obtain while struggling with cares and trials, will aid the harmony and deepen the melody of their song, as they traverse the desert, cross the Jordan, and ascend the throne. Anticipated trials have often thrown a gloom over the scenes and circumstances

of life; and the spirit, dreading what it ought to have hailed, has sat pensive and forlorn in the shades, with scarcely a ray of hope or beam of sunshine. But when trial comes, support and comfort accompany it; and when the trial is over, instead of complaining of desolations, of which it was expected trial would be the cause, reasons appear for adoring the love and wisdom that sent and superintended it. Our estimate of affliction while we are passing through it, and when we are delivered from it, differs materially. Do the martyrs in heaven regret that they waded to their rest through stormy seas? Do they wish they had been conducted home in another path, and that they had been prepared for their rest by other means? Are they at all disposed to murmur when memory recalls the conflicts and perils of earth? No, this cannot be. They are thankful for the cross they carried, as for the crown they wear—for the discipline of providence, as for the consummation of grace. Singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, with one voice they exclaim, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." Rev. xv. 3.

But, do the sons of sorrow upon earth, who have been trained by affliction to habits of faith

and of self-denial, deplore the process of their improvement? Now that they are reaping the peaceable fruits of righteousness, do they complain that the culture was unskilful and unkind? Who that rises from a bed of sickness more holy, more desirous of pleasing God, more concerned to enjoy his presence, and more determined to glorify his name than when he first lay prostrate upon it, ever regrets having been separated for a season from the all-engrossing affairs of this lower world, and having had time allowed him for examination, reflection, and prayer? Does the Christian who was rich complain of having become poor, when, by means of his reverses, he is delivered from a carnal mind, and made more happy in the love of God? What though the vine be laid waste and the fig-tree barked?—yet, if the soul is but enlivened to experience, and enlarged to practise “the truth as it is in Jesus,” the loss is trifling compared with the gain. Spiritual blessings are so superior to temporal, that if the former are made to accumulate by the diminution of the latter, the exchange will never be regretted. When the Lord’s fan is in his hand, it is but to purge his floor; and the scattering of the chaff is a mercy to be thankfully acknowledged, not a judgment to be deplored. He who planned our salvation, fulfils his designs by the most appropriate

means ; and as every stroke of his rod teaches us the love of his heart, in the unity of his designs and movements we may find sweet repose.

“ Consider whatever be thy fate, that it might and ought to
have been worse.

“ And that it lieth in thy hand to gather blessing from
afflictions.”

IV. At this conclusion, then, do we arrive, and a delightful one it is, that between God’s spiritual and providential dispensations there is harmonious co-operation ; that we have no more to fear from the affliction he superintends, than from the covenant he has established ; and that as there are reasons why we should rejoice in his promises, there are also reasons, and as substantial too, why we should be satisfied with the methods employed by his wisdom to endear them. The promises can be precious to those only who are brought into the circumstances to which they relate ; and there is so much power and love in God’s truth, that they who feel and enjoy it must be blessed by what means soever it may be conveyed to their hearts. On the mount of communion with God ; when raised to an assurance that our names are written in heaven ; when, before the cross of Christ we weep over our sins, and then behold them all borne away by our great and glorious Surety, do we not rejoice in the

Divine will? Rejoice we may, rejoice we must. If we were to hold our peace, the stones would cry out. But why should we not also rejoice in the will of God, when we are trained, by suffering and conflict, for the life of faith on earth, and for the blest occupations of heaven? Affliction is an important part of the agency by which the mind is enlightened, the conscience is quickened, and the soul is arrayed in the beauties of holiness; it is, therefore, doing God's will, by accomplishing his gracious work in our souls. And shall we murmur and be discontented? "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." James i. 2—4.

"Although there be a diversity in the conduct of God, it is always a diversity of wisdom. There is in his conduct a uniformity, which is the great character of his actions.

"Is there, think you, any condition so noble, that he cannot elevate you to it—any title so desirable, that he cannot grace you with it—any treasure too immense for him to bestow—would the law of proportion, his invariable rule, permit him? Or dost thou think that God takes pleasure in embittering thy life, in taking away thy

children, in tarnishing thy glory, in subverting thine establishments, in crushing thy house, and in precipitating thee from the highest human grandeur to the lowest and most mortifying station? Why then does he at any time reduce us to these dismal extremities? Order requires God, who intends to save you, to employ those means which are most likely to conduct you to salvation, or if you refuse to profit, then to harden you under them. He wills your salvation, and therefore removes all your obstacles to salvation. He takes away a child, because it has become an idol; he tarnishes grandeur, because it dazzles and infatuates its possessors; he subverts palaces, because they make men forget graves, their last home; he precipitates them from pinnacles of earthly glory, because they make them reasons for vanity and insolence; he involves his creatures in pain and torture, because these alone make men feel their diminutiveness, their dependence, their nullity. Order requires God, who wills your salvation, to employ the most proper means to conduct you to it.

“ I will venture to affirm, that one chief cause of the weakness of our faith is our inattention to this harmony of perfections, this uniformity of government in God. We generally consider the perfections of God and his actions separately, and

independently of those infinite relations which the last have to the first. Hence, when God displays what he calls his justice, he seems to us to cease to be kind; and when he displays what we call goodness, he seems to suspend his rigid justice. Hence it seems to us, his attributes perpetually clash, so that he cannot exercise one without doing violence to another. Hence we sometimes fear God without loving him, and at other times love him without fearing him.

“A work so different, and, in some sort, so opposite in its parts, is, however, the work of one and the same God: and what is more remarkable, a work, the parts of which are so opposite, arises from one principle, that is, from the union and harmony of the Divine perfections.”*

The following remarks of the Rev. John Breay, are apposite and beautiful:—“It is indeed delightful to trace the hand of God in past events, and to see that, though our plans were disconcerted, desires crossed, and expectations disappointed, he (though, perhaps, at the time, unacknowledged and unseen) was the doer of all, and that all was done in love and mercy. I know nothing which is so well calculated, when viewed in connexion with Divine promises, to strengthen our faith for

the future, as the review of God's goodness during the past. It is not desirable to speculate upon our employment in the heavenly world. Where revelation is silent we cannot speak with confidence; but if we may be allowed to reason from analogy, there is a measure of probability connected with the thought, that part of our enjoyment in glory will consist in reviewing what God has done for us in grace. We shall see that his word and providence were running in parallel lines, where we thought or feared they intersected each other; and that he was, by the dispensations of the latter, fulfilling the directions of the former, and doing all things well. We find on the sea of life as mariners find on the ocean, that cross winds, in the end, bring the vessel into port more effectually than direct ones would have done. In reviewing the history of my unworthy life, I have reason to say so. Had a direct wind continued to blow, I should have been in the law; God ordered a cross wind to arise, and I was sent into the church. Oh, how have I since desired, and sometimes attempted to praise him, for those cross winds, against which I bent the sails, and turned the rudder of my heaven-directed bark! If, then, in our future progress to eternity, the sky should be darkened, the billows swell, and the tempest howl around us, let us endeavour to cheer each

other by recollections of the past, and sing, as we are borne through those tempests unto glory, 'God is love.'"

"Through all the various, shifting scene
Of life's mistaken ill or good,
Thy hand, O God! conducts unseen
The beautiful vicissitude.

Thou givest with paternal care,—
Howe'er unjustly we complain,—
To each their necessary share
Of joy and sorrow, health and pain.

All things on earth, and all in heaven,
On thy eternal will depend;
And all for greater good were given,
And all shall in thy glory end.

This be my care, to all beside
Indifferent let my wishes be;
Passion be calm, and dumb be pride,
And fixed, O God, my soul on thee."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RELATION WHICH SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION BEARS TO THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

THE Lord's plans are simple and harmonious ; and as the details of each agree with the designs of the whole, if we think aright of God in providence, we shall have clear views of the riches of his grace ; and if we meditate thankfully on the wondrous operations of his grace, we shall adore the wise and merciful arrangements of his providence. He decrees an end, that end he secures by an agency which his wisdom selects, and over which his love throws its controlling influence.

Believers in Jesus, therefore, are as safe in providential adversity, as in spiritual prosperity. And their trials are all necessary. By necessity, fatalism is not intended. For although one event necessarily rises out of another, the effect of one cause becoming a cause of other effects, yet all we mean by it, is, the intimate connexion which God has established between the salvation of his

people, and the means he employs to effect it. No trial will ever come, unless there exist a necessity for its being sent. The Divine will is the law of the Divine procedure; and as our sanctification is both purposed and enjoined, and is also related to the atonement, the designs of affliction harmonise with the moral purposes of the Saviour's death, and thus further illustrate the unity of the Divine government.

Here, too, it is believed we shall discover the kind intentions of our heavenly Father, and some of the reasons we have for rejoicing in his love, even when he afflicts us.

I. A few preliminary observations are required to guard the reader against mistakes which would embarrass the whole question, and at once deprive it of its power to bless and relieve the burdened mind.

1. We do not place the atonement of the Son of God and affliction in the same scale of importance. The death of Christ is our hope—our exclusive hope in life and in death; and it will be the subject of our contemplation and the theme of our song in glory. His death does that for man which no affliction can do—which affliction was never designed to do. Some persons attach too much importance to the trials of life, and undervalue, thereby, both the work of Christ and

the work of the Spirit. Our reconciliation to God results, not from the sufferings we endure, but from *His* sufferings who, becoming our surety, died the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. As sinners, needing pardon, justification, and purification, we must repair to his cross, wash away our iniquities in the fountain he hath opened for sin and uncleanness, and submit to the righteousness which is to all, and upon all, them that believe. "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." Rom. iii. 20. "Without shedding of blood is no remission." Heb. ix. 22.

2. The wisdom and love of Christ, which shine so conspicuously in the atonement, are visible in the afflictions of the church. At the cross, the moral perfections of Deity appear in their glory; there they assume new forms of beauty, fresh combinations of excellency, which it were in vain to look for anywhere else; and there they are contemplated by holy angels, as well as by redeemed sinners, with astonishment and delight. And are they not discernible, also, in the trial that weans the heart from the world, that makes the promise sweet, that endears the throne of grace, and that excites desires for the Lord's presence? By the eye of faith they are seen in every paternal chastisement. Would the Lord, our Father and

Friend, correct us, if he did not love us? but as he loves us, and therefore chastises us, must we not exclaim, with the adoring disciples, “He hath done all things well”?

3. It is important we should remember, that He who died for our sins and rose again for our justification, is he who afflicts us. Yes—*he* wounds who was himself wounded for our transgressions, and on whom the chastisement of our peace was laid. He toiled in the desert, agonized in the garden, expired on the cross, for our salvation; and, “when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” “He ascended to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God;” not, however, to forget his church in the wilderness. No: “He ever liveth to make intercession for us;” and from heaven he sends down the grace we need to enable us to persevere in the life of holiness, till we attain the glory he has promised to bestow. He employs both angels and men to do us good; and very frequently, by the direct interposition of his own power, teaches us how deeply he is concerned for our welfare. In the storm, he whispers, “It is I, be not afraid.” He commands us to trust him at all times, and with all our circumstances. He is our hope, both in relation to the life that now is, and that which is to come; and we

have committed our souls, with all their concerns, into his hands, momentous as they are. Nor have we any cause to regret it; for “he is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.” And can we not trust him with our bodies, and with all our temporal concerns? We may cast all our care upon him; and if we do not, it implies a want of confidence which, in the judgment of those who know not the Lord, is a reflection on his ability, or on his disposition, or on both. For if we are as unhappy and as desponding as other men, where, they may justly ask, is either your faith, or your God? We should well consider how it is that, if he be the willing, the able Saviour, we are convinced he is, we do not trust him? In the work of redemption, when he died for us, and in the work of conversion, when he renewed us, he manifested his love and pity, his wisdom and power. And when he afflicts us, he does not lay aside any of those personal excellencies of character which constituted his beauty and goodness when he became a man of sorrows, and tabernacled here below. He is “the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.” If he be worthy of our love and confidence as a *suffering* Saviour, he is equally worthy of it as a *chastising* Saviour; and to be consistent, we must praise him as well

when he wounds as when he heals,—as cordially when he places us in the furnace, as when he takes us out of it. His love is as tender, his care is as kind, his sympathy is as deep, when he afflicts us, as when he intercedes for us ; for he pleads for us in heaven at the very moment he chastises us on earth. His people are precious in his sight. His love is not fitful, evanescent, fluctuating : it is deep, fixed, unchanging. Cares may oppress, shadows of adversity may rest upon them, but they are as dear to him as if no burdens were borne, no tears were shed, no sighs were uttered. He ought, then, to be as dear to them when he uses the rod as when he uses the crook ; the one being as striking an emblem of a Saviour's love, as the other of a Shepherd's care. It is the privilege of afflicted Christians to know that Jesus has his eye upon them, that his hand is stretched out to help them, and that in his love they may at all times confide. “Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” Isaiah xxvi. 4.

4. Although the government of the church, and of the world for the sake of the church, is upon Christ's shoulders, yet there are great and perplexing mysteries in his providential dealings with his people. Events for which we are unable to account arise ; and there are trials upon which

we may ponder, but about which we are almost afraid to express an opinion. Mystery implies ignorance, either in whole or in part, about truths revealed and facts that have occurred. Into the secret things which belong to God it would be presumptuous for us to attempt to inquire ; they are altogether hidden from our view. And some of the truths of Scripture are hard to be understood : our knowledge of them amounts to little more than conjecture. The eye is sometimes dimmed by the splendour of the objects contemplated, and half a thought is a load to the mind which it can scarcely bear.

But do we not believe the truth, although we cannot comprehend it ? The incarnation of Jesus Christ ; the Godhead, as subsisting in a Trinity of Persons, bearing the names of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ; the vital union of Christ and his church ; the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the bodies of the saints, are revealed facts, and we receive them simply because they are found in the Bible. We have not a perfect knowledge of them ; yet, notwithstanding their incomprehensibleness, they afford us rest and peace. Mystery neither shakes our faith, nor disturbs our confidence.

Why, then, should afflictions be allowed to distress us ? The mysteries of grace are far more profound than the mysteries of providence. It

has already been remarked, that mystery lies on the side of mercy ; yet we believe the great facts which mercy has revealed and recorded, and do not doubt the accomplishment of the events which mercy has foretold. The word of the Lord is sufficiently clear and conclusive to awaken in our minds the full assurance of hope respecting the ultimate glory of the church, and the universal dominion of the Messiah. However dark may be some of the signs of the times, we look, with calm and intelligent expectation, for the day when the little stone shall become a great mountain, and shall fill the whole earth. And shall we doubt the truth of those plain statements of the Bible which refer to our afflictions—which explain their nature and disclose their design ? Shall we *seek* consolation from those truths which are so mysterious, that angels, with their intelligence, are obliged to look into them ? and shall we *refuse* consolation when it comes to us through the medium of sanctified affliction ? Why should we not be as calm and as free, as thankful and as happy, when we pass under the rod, as when we enter the bond of the covenant ? Feel we ought, feel we must, for insensibility is as much opposed to a right state of mind as infidelity. But we have more cause to wonder at mercies than at judgments. At the cross, before the throne, with

the soul full of peaceful expectation, speak of mercy in connexion with mystery if you please. But on the bed of sickness, in the valley of trouble, talk of mercy without mystery ; or, at least, of mercy in her less mysterious forms of operation, and of mercy in her untiring efforts to enrich the soul for which the Saviour bled.

5. In consequence of the interest which the Christian has in the death of Christ, his afflictions are not curses, but blessings. “He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee.” Job v. 19. The curse is gone, for Jesus bare it in his own body on the tree, when he redeemed us from the curse of the law. Affliction is indeed a part of the curse that fell upon our nature after our first parents had apostatised from God, and but for sin we should have known nothing of sorrow. Sin is the cause of suffering, and the briers of the wilderness are the fruits of our transgression. Sickness, pain of body, distress of mind, and other mental and physical calamities, are ravages of a desolating evil ; and we cannot but deplore the disorder and confusion which have sprung up among the creatures of that glorious Creator, who, when he had given the last touch to the objects he had fashioned, pronounced them all good. The natural and moral creation then presented a beauteous scene which cannot be

now described; and we have no conception of the delight with which the Lord contemplated the works of his hand, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. Great was the delight of heaven. Calm, though elevated, were the transports of earth.

But the scene soon changed. Songs were turned into sighs. Death took the place of life. Darkness succeeded light. Where love had smiled, enmity frowned. The whole aspect of things was changed. Man, the author of his own destruction, and the cause of his children's misery, sunk into an abyss of woe, helpless, undone; and, had not an Almighty arm been stretched out for his deliverance, he must for ever have perished. Grief is the portion of the sinner—the lot of his inheritance; and we are far from wishing to displace from the Christian's mind those humiliating conceptions of his fallen state which he is wont to cherish when the afflicting hand of God is upon him. No; we would rather urge him to search more deeply still into his condition as a transgressor, and to weep with increasing bitterness at the recollection of his departure from God. Our sins are set in the light of *our* countenance when we are afflicted; and the sorrows of life are most humiliating to those who are taught by them their guilt and help-

lessness. When a loathsome disease breaks out in the body ; when the balance of mind, through some physical or moral cause, is disturbed, and the intellect, once strong and bright, becomes feeble and obscure, who can contemplate the wreck without desecrating the storm that caused it? O sin, what hast thou done ! what an enemy art thou to the creatures of God ! what personal, what social, what national miseries hast thou induced ! The thought that recalls thy dark deeds to mind, awakens in the spiritual heart the keenest emotions of remorse and shame. We cannot remember the wormwood and the gall but our souls must be humbled within us, and while trouble lasts, the wormwood and the gall cannot be forgotten. Forget that we are sinners and deserve to die, so long as chastisement brings our follies to remembrance ! Impossible. We may meekly submit to the stroke, but we *must* confess and mourn over the evil that rendered it necessary.

But even this dark scene has a bright side to which we may cast the eye of hope, and about which we may allow pleasing reflections to linger. For the curse is either turned into a blessing, or is made subservient to our benefit. Being in a state of reconciliation to God, God's universe is reconciled to us. The atonement of Jesus Christ has given the current of events a direction in our

favour. "Thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field; and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee." Job v. 23. He who bled for our redemption manages all our affairs, even the meanest of them; and when evils are brought into instrumental connexion with his love, they become their own remedies, and mediums of light and power to the soul they have injured. By sin, man is corrected for having sinned; but the correction is so wisely and so mercifully administered, that light springs from darkness, and joy flows from sorrow. God blesses his people, and he will not allow their enemies to injure them. To ungodly men, affliction may be a curse—a judgment from the God they have insulted; it may act as a curse, goading the heart to rebellion, and occasioning fearful expressions of its enmity against the truth. No unbeliever, *as* an unbeliever, has any scriptural reason to think that his afflictions will be overruled for his good. A rebel, and such an unbeliever is, has everything to dread from the trials of life. Afflictions are some of the kind, admonitory dispensations of God's mercy; and they call very loudly upon the sinner to repent of his sins, and to turn from them unto Him who smites: but as unbelief is the most heinous of his offences, so long as he rejects Christ, so long will he be exposed to the fearful displeasure of the God that sent

him, and who will, sooner or later, resent this insult offered to his love. To derive saving benefit from trial, a man must be first reconciled to God by the death of Christ. But a believer, though once far off, *is* made nigh by the blood of Christ ; he *is* washed, justified, sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. *He* bears, therefore, a most interesting relation to God and his laws ; and being both the child of his care, and an obedient subject of his government, everything is in train to his advantage. He is blessed ; and be his path or his circumstances what they may, his blessings must accumulate. Upon his head no curse can fall, for to his heart the blood of Christ has been applied. He is so skilfully shielded in battle, and so securely sheltered when storms arise, that while he is a follower of that which is good, none can harm him. 1 Pet. iii. 13. Precious thought ! in sickness, in poverty, in pain, in trial, there is to the Christian no curse. The death of Jesus annihilated the curse ; it fell on him ; and in his victories—for though he died he conquered—it was swallowed up.

Afflicted Christian, is not this balm to your wounded spirit ? The curse is gone, and gone for ever. What is there, then, in any of your afflictions to alarm you ? If you search for the curse, you will not find it. With unpardoned sin, the

curse retains all its malignity and power. But your guilt is expiated, your transgressions are all forgiven. The blood of Jesus has purged away your iniquities, and you are dealt with as a pardoned, justified sinner; not as a sinner exposed to eternal death, but as a believer in Christ, walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, and against whom there is no condemnation. Rom. viii. 1.

To be true, therefore, to your principles, and to be consistent with them, you must be as satisfied with the providence of God,—believing it to be equitable, wise, and gracious, as you are delighted with the sacrifice of the cross,—knowing it to be commensurate with the demands of the law, and adequate to your necessities; and to have peace, as a sinner, from the atonement, you must, as a believer, be contented with your lot. You cannot expect to realise the benefits of Christ's death, unless you are thankful for his reign, and grateful, too, for the means by which he fulfils the good pleasure of his goodness. Can you assign any substantial reason why your faith should not be as simple and as strong in relation to the government of Jesus, as it is to his death? Can you trust him, do you trust him, as dying on the cross? then why not trust him as reigning on the throne? If you confide in him when he intercedes with

God on your behalf, why not when he pleads with you on God's behalf? He was not more concerned for your welfare when he agonized in the garden, than he is concerned for it now—now that he has brought you into the wilderness—now that he is causing you to pass under the rod. If you have reason to bless him at one time, you have reason to bless him at all times. To taste his love in one place, is to be brought under obligations to confide in it in all places. Whatever may be his plans or his methods, he is the same, without variableness or the shadow of a change.

Tried Christian, only allow this thought place in thy mind—only let it have power over thy heart, and in the deepest calamity thou wilt lie down and be at rest.

II. With these general observations, we pass to a more particular notice of the relation which sanctified affliction bears to the death of Christ.

Christ died for the ungodly, and by dying made an atonement for their sins. The substitution of the innocent for the guilty ; the acceptance of the obedience and death of the innocent on behalf of the guilty ; and the restoration of the apostate to favour, happiness, and honour, through the mediatorial intervention of the great Surety, are some of the principles and some of the happy results of that economy of mercy, which God established

as the basis of his fellowship with his erring creatures. Pardon, justification, and eternal life, are secured to believers by the death of Christ. "You that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy, and unblameable, and unproveable in his sight." Col. i. 21, 22. Having removed all the legal obstructions to our salvation out of the way—having honoured justice by magnifying the law, he has provided for our spiritual necessities, and has engaged to introduce us to a state of being which should reflect—which does reflect—the highest glory upon his cross and his throne.

With what feelings are *you* in the habit of contemplating the work of Jesus Christ?—a work which brings God and the sinner together in friendship never to be broken—in fellowship never to be disturbed. Many, alas! despise Christ and the messages of his love. But his cross is all your hope; to it you repair; and from it you derive your assurance of heaven. To you, the cross is a refuge and a home. You love the cross. The cross is your boast, and the burden of your song. You cannot think of the cross without wonder; it is the most glorious object in the universe; its glory is beyond all conception.

Even angels who behold the Saviour's unveiled beauty, and who have investigated his claims to an extent far beyond the limits of our inquiry, adore at the cross as they never did at the throne, even when they poured their grateful ascriptions forth alone, ere the foundations of the earth were laid. Wonder, O heavens, at the scenes which the cross unfolds—at the conquest which the cross achieves! The cross is the delight of heaven and of earth—of angels and of men; and it will be the object of God's complacent regard for ever. To read about the cross, to hear about it, to feel its attraction, to gather its fruit, is joy to the heart, augmenting and deepening daily. Under the law, when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began, and it continued till the burnt offering was finished. 2 Chron. xxix. 28. And shall we not sing our song? As we praise Christ for his atoning death, our love to him is drawn forth; and the attachment formed at his cross can never be destroyed.

But what, perhaps you are ready to ask, has this to do with my afflictions? The cross is precious, and I know something of its worth and glory. But my trials,—ah, my trials! by these I am discouraged and cast down. Well, afflicted you may be, and your afflictions may be heavy; and though it cannot be expected that you

will ever love affliction, still it is hoped that you will bear it patiently, for the sake of Him who hath afflicted you. Get your mind impressed with the fact, that He who died for your salvation chastises you for your profit. Yes, *He* afflicts you; and he does it with the same feelings with which he redeemed you, and precisely from the same motives. Affliction adds no glory to the cross, for it derives from the death of Christ all its sanctifying virtue; and the more precious the cross is to our souls, the more benefit we shall derive from the affliction, through which the Redeemer pours his love into the heart. The aspect of trial, viewed as a parental chastisement, is just that which the atonement bears; and why can you not regard the Saviour when he tries you, with the same feelings which you cherish toward him when you think of his death and resurrection, ascension and intercession? The grace of his character and the graciousness of his conduct are apparent in the one case, as well as in the other.

We are not confounding the atonement with afflictions, nor attaching the same importance to *our* sorrows that we attach to those of our Lord. The cross of Christ is the ruling theme of the Gospel; and its power in the heart is that of the magnet in creation, which sets all right and keeps all right; while affliction, as a means to an end,

is subsidiary only to some of the great purposes which the cross is to accomplish. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission;" there can be none. And without attempting to conceive what would be the consequences of disturbing God's order, it may nevertheless be said that, as it is certain afflictions are employed to accomplish his will, we have no right to expect its fulfilment without them. If Christ had not died, we must have perished; and but for the trials of life, our minds in relation to his death might have been hostile. Some godly people attribute almost all their spirituality to sanctified afflictions; and even those who are brought into fellowship with Christ by the more direct agency of his Spirit, unconnected with trial, admit that they have often been afflicted for the express purpose of increasing their experimental knowledge of those truths with which they were already acquainted; and that, therefore, so far from affliction, in their case, counteracting the designs of the Saviour's death, it harmonises with them, and brings them to pass.

Surely, then, as trial is a part—an important part—of that instrumentality by which God trains his people for rest and service here, and for happiness and occupation hereafter, the Christian need not be alarmed at trial. On the contrary,

he may welcome it as a blessing, in which he will find much to console him, and to make him a wiser, a happier, and a better man. Affliction teaches him the love of God, the compassion of Christ, the condescension and grace of the Holy Spirit; and in the heaviest calamity he has no reason to fear a single injury. Without Christ's permission not a hair of his head can perish. He who weighs the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance, measures out the sorrows of his people; and so wisely are the affairs of life adjusted, that to alter what he has arranged, would be to turn the perfection of order into wild confusion, and that at the time when the very order which he has established can alone secure our safety and comfort. "He who made us, and who in stupendous mercy has called us as his sheep, has appointed your lot and mine; and in his wise disposal, given it to be ours, in preference to all others which he could as easily have chosen for us. We therefore should not even *wish* it were otherwise than what it is; nor could we exchange it without a loss."* To have peace, our faith must be as simple and as confiding in relation to his providential government, as to the covenant of his grace. Indeed, we shall be embarrassed no less

* Hawkes.

respecting eternity than time, however clearly the ability of Christ to save may be revealed, if we are not free from unbelieving suspicions respecting the designs of his afflictive dispensations. Confidence in his wisdom and love when he strikes, is essential to joy and peace when he smiles. Dissatisfaction with the allotments of life, which, it must be remembered, are all his, is sure to diminish the joy which the heart would otherwise realise in the anticipations of a dying hour. If, when he became a Father, or when he acted a Father's part, he laid aside those gracious peculiarities which constitute him a suitable, a compassionate Saviour, we might dread the chastisement of his hand; but as his sympathies are as tender and as strong when he lays affliction upon us, as when he imparts consolation to us, we may repose as confidently, as delightfully, upon his love when the heavens gather blackness, as when lowering clouds have all vanished away. "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him," is the message which he commissions his servants to deliver to his people, whether they are in adversity or prosperity. Yes, afflicted believer, it is well. Canst thou not say, it is well? With thee, as "a sinner saved by grace," it must be well—well in the storm and in the calm; well in

life, well in death, well for ever. There are many things which we cannot know till we reach the world of perfect light; yet each Christian may say, "One thing I know *now*,—he is doing all things *well*. He is consulting my comfort, while he crosses me; and while he is bringing a dark cloud over my earthly prospects, the cloud, like that which guided and preserved Israel in the wilderness, may be a preservation from fatal enemies, and a guide to the Jerusalem which is above."*

Writing to one of his friends, a clergyman says, "Let me point you to Him who can sustain and cheer the mourner, and make up, by the abundant consolations which are to be found in himself, the loss of every created enjoyment which he withdraws. 'He hath done all things well.' He arranges, in his own infinite wisdom, all the afflictions as well as all the comforts of his people. The time, the connexion, the duration, the influence of all that occurs to the Christian is settled in heaven. Second causes, doubtless, intervene; but behind the machinery of all human events Jehovah is invisibly at work, directing all things to the accomplishment of his own will. On this

* Housman.

assurance faith reposes. The fig-tree may cease to blossom, the herd may be cut off from the stall, sickness may undermine our constitution, or death may remove our choicest and dearest friends; but still in the midst of all we may—what? Submit? Yes. Acquiesce? Yea, more:—even rejoice in the God of our salvation. From God's hand, and from his only, has this bereavement come. To you it is as mysterious as it is agonising. You and I are quite unable to see the reasons of this dispensation; but it was all previously arranged in heaven by Him who, though he giveth no account of any of his matters, doeth all things well, and as we ourselves should do them, could we but see the end and bearing of all events as he does. Our obvious duty is, therefore, under such circumstances, to be still, and know that he is God; and our wisdom as well as interest is, to endeavour to extract from the dark and heart-rending dispensation that personal edification which it is intended to convey. Has earth, with its attractions, had too much of your heart? The Redeemer is now telling you so, and in soft whispers of love inviting you to union and fellowship with him. Oh! listen to his voice. Cast yourself, with all your heavy sorrows—sorrows which no mortal can remove, entirely on him:

I entreat you let your tears flow in that channel which leads to the throne of God. Grief like yours wants a Saviour; and, blessed be his name, he is near.”*

“O Thou whose mercy guides my way,
Though now it seems severe,
Forbid my unbelief to say,
There is no mercy here.

O grant me to desire the pain
That comes in kindness down,
More than the world’s supremest gain
Succeeded by a frown.

Then, though Thou bend my spirit low,
Love only shall I see :
The very hand that strikes the blow
Was wounded once for me.”

* The Rev. John Breay.

CHAPTER IX.

AFFLICTION A MEDIUM THROUGH WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT
ORDINARILY CONVEYS SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS TO THE SOULS
OF MEN.

THIS is an important proposition in its relation both to the church and the world; and we must endeavour to ascertain its bearing, first, on the conversion of the heart to God; then on the advancement of the righteous in the ways of God.

I. The Holy Spirit is the author of all true religion. Without him it has no existence; it can have none. It is never superinduced by natural causes. A Christian is a new creature; he is created in Christ unto good works, which God hath before ordained that he should walk in them. All those principles which essentially belong to spiritual religion, are vital, and are of God; and, having produced them, he opens before them an appropriate sphere of action,—giving them the authority and power of law, and then subjecting them to the purposes of practical

Christianity. Thought settles down into habits of meditation ;—contrition, into habits of repentance ;—love, into habits of obedience ; and which habits, as they indicate life, so they adorn it. “Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord : walk as children of light : for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.” Eph. v. 8, 9.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of men being great, both in its nature and results, the creation of the world, the resurrection of the dead, the miracles of our Lord, and those wrought by the apostles for the confirmation of his truth, are employed to illustrate it ; and as the typical representation of a thing is less glorious than the thing represented, the change produced in the heart of the regenerated sinner is more marvellous than any physical miracles the world ever saw. The understanding is enlightened with the light of life ; the conscience is aroused from its slumberings to feel and plead for God ; the will is renewed, and influenced to choose the narrow way ; the affections are weaned from earth and set on things above ; the whole man—the body, the soul, and the spirit—is brought into cheerful subjection to the King of Zion ; the life of God takes possession of the heart, and the creature, once a rebel and an alien, becomes a child. “That

ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind: and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Eph. iv. 22—24.

This change is frequently effected in the season of affliction. Thousands of Christians bless God for the adversity which led them to reflection, and then to repentance; for they never prayed till they were brought into trouble. "In their affliction they will seek me early." Hos. v. 15. Outward trouble, when it is sanctified, awakens inward anxiety about the sin that has occasioned it; and as the heart is then more tender, more susceptible of impression, such a retrospect is taken of life, as leads to some fearful forebodings of the second death. The season of trial, too, is a period when the heart sometimes sickens with disappointment; when the fair scenes upon which the eye has been wont to rest with delightful anticipation, all vanish like a dream of the night, and give place to shadows, about which not even a ray of light is seen to fall. All now appears desolate, and he is forlorn and sad. The artificial dress of life is laid aside. The world is seen in its true character. The heart is left without any of those fictitious modes of

obtaining satisfaction to which it often resorted, and delusive opiates are no longer administered to the conscience. Character is left, and character is all that he can call his own. Property is gone. Health has fled. Comforts have vanished. Friends are dead, or they have withdrawn from their afflicted companion, to whose wounds they can apply no balm, and whose calamities have been increased by their treachery and folly.

Thus desolated—thus undone, where can he go for comfort?—to whom can he apply for solid, permanent relief? Has he no counsellor? Is he friendless? Is no hand stretched out to his rescue? To which of his former associates can he turn for succour? The arrow of conviction is lodged in his conscience, his sins are brought vividly to his remembrance, and he is oppressed with the burden of his guilt. Look in which direction soever he will, he catches the eye of his offended Creator and Judge; and though he moans piteously, as in dust and ashes, and cries loudly for help, refuge fails him. He now begins to reproach himself for having rebelled against God, and for having trampled upon the blood of the everlasting covenant, counting it an unholy thing, and doing despite to the Spirit of grace. Thus convinced of sin, and self-reproached, “the troubles of his heart are enlarged,” and he inquires

not so much for temporal as for spiritual deliverance. The cares of this life are felt, as they ought to be, but they are secondary in point of importance now. His great concern is to enter the refuge set before him in the Gospel, if, indeed, he may be permitted to do so—for of this he has some doubt. His own delinquency and danger having been pressed upon his attention, he inquires, with an awakened and an alarmed conscience, “What must I do to be saved?” The refuges of lies in which he trusted have been destroyed, and having no longer any confidence in the flesh, he seeks deliverance at the cross of Christ. He confesses his guilt, and implores mercy.

At length a degree of light springs up in his mind, and he as certainly knows that Christ is a Saviour, as that he himself is a sinner. He cannot, indeed, rejoice before God as a pardoned, accepted sinner; for almost the only thing he can do is to feel after God. This, however, he does; and though he does it with a trembling hand, he at length lays hold on the hope of eternal life, embraces the Gospel—that efficacious remedy for all the ills of a soul that sin hath stricken, rises into spiritual health, enters into peace, and enjoys, as the result of the Spirit’s witness, a calm consciousness that all his sins are forgiven him, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

He is now a happy man—happy in the exercise of faith upon the person and work of Christ, in the possession of a good hope through grace, and in the assurance of being at last received to glory. The prodigal son has returned home, and has received from his father a kind and cordial welcome; a feast is prepared for him; angels in heaven rejoice in his restoration to happiness and honour; Christian friends greet his arrival; the best robe is thrown around him; by kind gratulations and by Zion's cheerful songs he is taught the felicity which he may enjoy, and the delight which his return has occasioned in other minds; while the everlasting God, with infinite satisfaction and complacent love, declares, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." Luke xv. 11—32.

But does the restored child—now pardoned and purified—lament the affliction which led him to reflection, to repentance, and to prayer? Lament it! No. He blesses God for sending it, and for making it the means of his conversion; and had it been a thousand times heavier, so great is the misery he has escaped, so pure is the happiness he has obtained, that even then he would look back upon it as one of the most merciful events of his life, and one which would deserve to be celebrated by the loftiest note of a seraph's song.

Whatever may be his loss, his gain is infinite. His lost soul is found, and is safe for ever.

Manasseh's conversion affords a striking illustration of these sentiments. It is said, that "he did evil in the sight of the Lord, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. He reared up altars to Baalim, and worshipped the host of heaven. He caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom. Also he observed times, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger. And he set up a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of his God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever. So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel." Yet this monster of wickedness was brought to repentance, and was converted, too, when the afflicting hand of God was upon him. Surely he will for ever adore the wisdom and the love that employed means so simple, for an end so merciful and so great! "When he was in afflic-

tion he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him : and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him to Jerusalem, into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God.” 2 Chron. xxxiii. 1—13.

II. Affliction is a medium through which God conveys spiritual blessings to his converted people. By sanctified trial sinners are brought to repentance, and saints are advanced in their godly course. This must be apparent to any person who has studied the holy Scriptures, and who has had any experience of the grace of God. But it may be desirable to look at the fact, and then to account for it.

As to the fact itself, it appears that there is scarcely a blessing that enriches and consoles the believer’s mind—scarcely one that he desires to possess—that does not flow through this medium. Divine knowledge, spirituality of mind, conformity to the image of Jesus Christ, and assurance of faith, are blessings of inestimable value. To be consistent and happy, we must be fervent in prayer, joyful in hope, and patient in tribulation. It is right that we should hunger and thirst after righteousness, view the world in the light of eternity, form a correct estimate of spiritual things,

and enter, thankfully and intelligently, into the designs of our God and Father. Is it not meet that we should set our affections on things above, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus? Is not unbelief a sin, and faith a virtue? Growth in grace is enjoined by the great Head of the church, and is desired by all whom he hath introduced to the fellowship of his Gospel. If evils exist, it is desirable they should be removed; and if they do not exist, it is important they should be prevented.

About this we cannot entertain a moment's doubt. Why, then, it may be asked, should we ever murmur at those afflictions which are sent to improve our Christian principles, and to adorn our characters with the beauties of holiness? Affliction is both a corrective and a restorative; it restrains and impels; it weakens some points of our nature and strengthens others; it deadens the old man and enlivens the new. Sanctified trials are the means of enriching and purifying the soul.

The following citations may be taken as confirmatory of the truth of this remark:—"Behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and

will recover my wool and my flax. I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast-days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees. I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor [trouble] for a door of hope; and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." Hosea ii. 6—15. "I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will answer them: I will say, It is my people, and they shall say, The Lord is my God." Zech. xiii. 9. "Thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net; thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and water; but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." Psa. lxvi. 10—12. "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Job xxiii. 10. "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin." Isa. xxvii. 9. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of

your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." James i. 2—4. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. i. 6, 7.

We learn from these passages of holy Scripture, that afflictions are mediums of life, knowledge, peace, and purity to the church. And if it be asked, why God adopts this mode of blessing his people?—why affliction should be the way, and spiritual prosperity the end?—the reason will instantly appear; for—

Having glanced at the fact, that God does bless his tried people, we must endeavour to account for it.

As to the question, why trial should be the pathway to peace and joy? we reply—

1. It is so that we may be taught to appreciate our blessings. Labour endears rest. Pain sweetens pleasure. Conflict enhances the value of the prize. By our experience of the vanity of the creature, we are taught the all-sufficiency of the Creator. Broken cisterns convince us of the importance of

abiding near the fountain of living waters. The desert makes us long for the paradise. The thought of home is never sweeter, than when we are crossing stormy seas on our way to it. The feast is never more welcome than when the keen blast of adversity has sharpened the appetite. Were there no afflictions, nearly one half of the testamentary blessings of the everlasting covenant would be useless. By the loss of our mercies we are shown their real value, and the mere recollection of them is often of more service than their actual possession. "If spiritual blessings are bestowed through the medium of chastisement, we can only bless the mercy that holds the rod. Anything which tends to detach me from the 'things which are seen,' to which the flesh adheres most tenaciously, is a blessing in the form of a chastisement, and increases the share of happiness which is granted to us even here."*

2. Although the promises of the Gospel are the revealed intentions of a good and gracious God, and must therefore be suited to his people, they are actually precious to those only who are brought into the circumstances to which they relate. Take the first and second verses of the forty-third chapter of Isaiah, for example : "Fear

* Dr. Hope.

not ;—when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned ; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” Now, who will ever plead this promise, or expect its fulfilment, or prove its power, but those who are passing through the water and the fire ? To the tried Christian it is more precious than gold ; but it never can be a word in season to those who are not tried. For it is not simply the promise of the Divine presence ; were it so, it would be valued by all Christians at all times—the smile of Jesus is the life of the soul ; but this is the promise of his presence whilst his people are *in* the fire and *in* the water, and of the support and consolation which in these circumstances will enable them to bear, and that cheerfully, all that is laid upon them. And to experience *this* support and comfort, we must be in the furnace, the place where God engages to be with us.

3. We are tried, that a sense of our unworthiness and imperfection may be kept alive in our minds. But for afflictions, we should be disposed to forget the rock whence we were hewn, and the hole of the pit out of which we were digged ; and in seasons of spiritual enjoyment, had we not a thorn in the flesh, or something like it, we might be exalted above measure. So deceitful and weak

is the heart, that but for restraining grace, its pride will be increased by those visitations of sovereign mercy which are designed to humble it; and it will lose sight of God's free favour when the expressions of it are the clearest and the strongest. The heart is not to be trusted even at the moment when its facilities for spiritual improvement are the most felicitous. It needs a check and a goad every day;—something to teach it its dependence on God, its liability to err, and that it is consoled and blessed not for its own sake only, but for the honour of Him who died to procure for it both power and succour. That we may retain our consciousness of personal guilt, when the blood of atonement has healed our wounds, and the smile of God's countenance gladdens our hearts, we are led both to the cross and to the throne in the path of trial.

4. We are led this way also, that we may be able to sympathise with others in their afflictions. The church is one; and as each member has its proper function to perform, that the entire body may be healthful and vigorous, all the members must contribute their legitimate measure of influence. The law of sympathy is so important, and is vested with so much power, that the designs of God's love in constituting the church the body of Christ, cannot be realised, unless one believer is

brought into the circumstances that will enable him experimentally to enter into the joys and sorrows of another. "Rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep," are injunctions from the obligations of which we can never be released. Nor are they such that we need desire to be free from them ; for that which we are to do for others, we may expect they will do for us. As we weep with them in their trouble, so they are to weep with us in ours ; and our counsels and exhortations, falling like the dew on their spirit, will revive in them fraternal concern for our welfare. As there are some downcast Christians to whom God intends we should be messengers of mercy, before he sends us, he gives us some experience of their depression, and of their needed consolation. By afflicting us, he qualifies us to sympathise with those who suffer ; and by refreshing our spirits at the fountain of mercy, he gives us the tongue of the learned, that we may be able to speak a word in season to those who are weary. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort ; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." 2 Cor. i. 3, 4. "Every one can feel the force of these

words. The word of comfort comes with unspeakably greater power from the lips of a suffering Saviour, or a sorely tried disciple, than from the lips of one who has never known adversity."

This leads us to inquire why the wealthy land lies on the other side of the water and fire? Psa. lxvi. 12,—why consolation should be the end of affliction?

1. It is so, that all complaints may be silenced. If we are not hasty in our decisions, and we ought not to be so, we shall see that "all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies," and that the way in which we are led is not only right and safe, but the very best in which we could be led. If the trials of life were not beneficial in their results, there might be some semblance of plea for the feelings of a fearful, discontented mind; though in that case we should not be dealt with according to our sins, nor rewarded according to our iniquities; but as the remote, certainly, and very often the immediate, consequences of affliction are highly conducive to our permanent advantage, a murmuring thought is so unreasonable and sinful, that but for the Divine forbearance, we should, in some moment of angry disquietude, be cut down and deprived of hope. The afflictions of the Jews were to do them good at their latter

end; and when they were settled in the promised land, they had no reason to complain of the way in which they had been led toward it. At the close of their journey they were amply repaid for all their previous privations. And it is so with God's afflicted people now. The peaceable fruit of righteousness which they gather after the affliction is over, is a rich reward for all their sufferings.

2. By leading us in this way, God designs to keep alive in our minds the hope of brighter and better times. The Christian's prospects are, in reality, more glorious than his actual possessions. When our trials may end we do not know, nor can we tell what we may have to suffer before the storm passes away. The vessel may be all but wrecked; there may be but a step between us and death; we may not be able to see our way out of difficulty; one course only may be open to us, and though that course, if taken, may plunge us into more affliction, we may be obliged to take it. Where and when conflicts and cares may end, we know not. Still, we are not without hope. Hope is our salvation in trouble; and peaceful anticipations of deliverance from it are a stay to the mind and a solace to the heart while trouble lasts. Is it night with us? the morning cometh, and with it the sunshine and the song. Are we

sailing through “seas of deep distress?” the port is not far off, and the perils of the voyage will be forgotten when we reach the peaceful shore. Are we wrestling with some hostile foe? the prize will soon be won. Our prospects are bright; and if we thought less about the toils of our journey, and more of its end, we should have more peace on our way, and brighter discoveries of the home to which it leads.

“Yet a season, and you know
 Happy entrance shall be given;
 All your sorrows left below,
 And earth exchanged for heaven.”

3. The Lord's dealings towards us are thus arranged, that we might be able to justify his procedure to those persons who say that our trials reflect either on his wisdom or his power. How strange are the workings of the human mind! Some Christians think they are not interested in the love of God, because their trials are so few; whereas others conclude they cannot be right, because their afflictions are so many. Others, again, imagine that if God could have prevented the suffering of those who profess to be his, he would not have allowed them to be brought into such distressing circumstances; and if he has power to avert the storm, and does not, then they ask, “Are his tender mercies clean gone

for ever?" "Where now is thy God?" is the taunting interrogation by which Satan wounds the mind already distressed. Are these his ways?—are these sharp trials consonant with his promises?—if God did indeed love and care for you, would he permit you to be thus troubled, when, if any dependence is to be placed upon his word, he could, in a moment, alter the scene and hush the storm? Ah, Christian reader! such reflections as these upon the wise and affectionate conduct of thy God and Father, must be more bitter to thy heart than the bitterest cup he ever placed in thy hand; for thou knowest well that his ways are equal and merciful, that he never strikes if the blow be not required, and that the comfort he imparts is greater than that he takes away.

Bear your testimony, then, to his loving-kindness and truth; bear it decidedly, uniformly, constantly; and bear it as well by the equanimity of your temper and the contentedness of your mind, in seasons of adversity, as by the wisdom of your words and the general consistency of your conduct, in prosperity. Let those about you know that all the events of life, even the most distressing, are working for your good, and that they must terminate in your permanent advantage. Tell them that your convictions of God's ways awaken blessed and bright hopes of his protection

and favour, whatever may be your circumstances ; and that your expectations of being benefited by the most trying and the most mysterious of his providential dispensations, are so settled, that you dare not,—nay more, that you would not turn a straw to alter his plans, or the methods by which he accomplishes them. You know that he is doing you good by the severest of your afflictions, and that to disturb his arrangements, could you do it, would be followed by disastrous consequences.

III. To those who are passing through trouble, to those who have misjudged the nature and design of their afflictions, and to those also who are conscious that their trials are the result of their own imprudence, this view of the case is adapted to administer instruction, reproof, and encouragement.

1. Let us weep over the imperfections that have rendered our trials necessary. We are sinners—sinners notwithstanding the grace we have received, and which has enabled us, in some measure, to mortify the deeds of the body, and to crucify the lusts of the flesh. Yes, we are sinners both in relation to the law and the gospel ; and our sins are the causes of our sorrows. Had we not been rebellious children, our most merciful Father would not have chastised

us. Under the gentle stroke of his hand let us therefore fall. We may learn wisdom by the things which we suffer; and if the goodness of God, as manifested by our afflictions, should lead us to repentance, we shall be improved by the effects of our folly. Is not the thought deeply humiliating, that we cannot go on well in the Divine life without affliction?—that we require this constant goading?—that there is so much dross about us as to render necessary a continuous purifying process? It is indeed affecting! We cannot think of it without tears. How dark are our minds!—how wayward our wills! The bitterest lamentations we can utter ought to be poured forth, as we compare our advancement with the means which have been employed to promote it.

“Saviour, though my rebellious will
Has been by thy blest power renewed;
Yet in its secret workings still,
How much remains to be subdued!”

2. But there is no reason why we should despond. God is good, and of great mercy; slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and in truth. He shows us favour at the very moment he corrects us; and the storm that bursts over our heads is but the agency of his love, employed to purify and equalise the spiritual elements of the soul. Be not discouraged, afflicted Christian:

the Lord, your God is with you; the bruised reed shall not be broken, the smoking flax shall not be quenched. Look up and look forward. The benefit you have already derived from affliction is not to be compared with the advantages which are to follow. The past is a pledge of the future, and the present moment is a period upon which, in heaven, you will look back with thankfulness. The trying events of yesterday, were intended to swell the tide of your joy to-day; and the waters of sorrow, now so fast accumulating, will ere long burst forth, not to desolate, but to irrigate the soil, once barren, but now under culture, and destined to be fruitful, very fruitful, to the Lord's honour.

3. Let us cheerfully submit to the will of our heavenly Father. "Till the heart and mind are brought to bow down in absolute submission, there is no rest for the soul."* "Resignation is one of the last and highest attainments of the Christian life."†

"My God and Father, while I stray
Far from my home in life's rough way,
Oh teach me from my heart to say—
Thy will be done.

Though dark my path and sad my lot,
Let me be still, and murmur not;
But breathe the prayer divinely taught—
Thy will be done.

If thou should'st call me to resign
What most I prize—it ne'er was mine;
I only yield thee what was thine—
Thy will be done.

Should pining sickness waste away
My life in premature decay,
My Father, still I'll strive to say—
Thy will be done.

If but my fainting heart be bless'd
With thy sweet Spirit for its guest,
My God! to thee I leave the rest—
Thy will be done.

Renew my will from day to day,
Blend it with thine, and take away
All that now makes it hard to say—
Thy will be done.

Then, when on earth I breathe no more
The prayer oft mixed with tears before,
I'll sing upon a happier shore—
Thy will be done."

CHAPTER X.

AFFLICTION CONSIDERED IN CONNEXION WITH BELIEVING PRAYER.

“MEN ought always to pray, and not to faint.” Without prayer, the soul cannot prosper. Prayer has power with God, and prevails. By prayer blessings are obtained, disasters are averted. Prayer has an influence in heaven, and on earth; “it moves the Arm that moves the world;” and it throws into the ordinary events of life a subduing and a regulating energy, before which hostile hosts have trembled, and by which the feeble have become as David, and David has become as the angel of the Lord. Prayer draws Omnipotence to the aid of feeble humanity, and helps the heart, naturally unfitted to struggle with difficulties, to brave shocks that have made nations to tremble. Without prayer we can no more live the life of faith, than we can live, without faith, a life of prayer. Prayer has access to the cross and to the throne; to the Priest and to the Sovereign; also

to the boundless treasures of God's infinite grace. Happy is he that prayeth always.

I. Prayer must be considered in connexion with the work of the Holy Spirit ; for when we are left to the unaided powers of our own minds, we are not sufficient for this holy exercise. Observe the apostle's statement : " Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities : for we know not what we should pray for as we ought : but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." Rom. viii. 26, 27. Without the instruction which the Holy Spirit imparts, we should be ignorant of our true condition, and unable even to spread those wants before the Lord, of which we might be conscious. The work of the Spirit is as closely allied to " the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man," as the work of Christ is to the hope and peace of a guilty man ; and the aid which the Holy Spirit affords the prayerful Christian, is as gracious as that which he affords to the penitent sinner. It is also part of one entire scale of operation, consistent with itself, and harmonious in all its parts. The Spirit never teaches a man to pray that God's work may be undone, or that his purposes may be frustrated. The prayers he indites are accordant

with God's will, with the designs of Christ's death, and with his own merciful intentions; and if we could always distinguish his inwrought intercessions from those desires of our minds which he does not awaken, we should ascertain, so far as prayer in our hearts indicates his purposes, what was in his mind concerning us.

Our prayers, however, are not always an index to his intentions. We often ask in error, both of our actual condition and of his will. Nor do we always pray submissively—we sometimes more resemble dictators than suppliants. But just so far as we pray with the Spirit, and with the understanding also, our desires for his salvation are the disclosures of his heart respecting our salvation. The sigh he raises in our souls is the pulsation of his love toward us; and whatever he teaches us to pray for, it would be well for us to receive, and to obtain through what medium soever he may be pleased to impart it. The prayer of faith is the only prayer which God hath engaged to answer; and this is spiritual prayer—prayer which accords with the Divine will. “This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us. And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.” 1 John v. 14, 15.

But what is the will of God concerning us?

“This is the will of God, even your sanctification.”

1 Thess. iv. 3. Both his promises and his precepts teach us his will; and if we seek to be enriched according to the former, while we guide our course by the latter, we cannot err. And the precept must be obeyed, in order that the promise may be fulfilled. God’s will is that we should be holy, even as he is holy. “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” Rom. xii. 2. “That ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God. Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.” Col. i. 9—11. *This is God’s will concerning us.*

II. But what do we seek at God’s hands, when we pour out our hearts before him? Have we no intelligent perceptions of our necessities? Are we seeking an unknown good?—a thing about which we have only some vague conception, and which, when obtained, we may undervalue? Spiritual desires teach us our actual wants; and ascertaining from the Scriptures the provisions which

Divine mercy has made for a perishing world, do we not seek to be supplied according to "his riches in glory by Christ Jesus?" Phil. iv. 18. We desire the blessings of the everlasting covenant, in their abundance and variety; nor can we be satisfied with anything less than large and continuous communications of the grace of God. We are desirous of seeing the King in his beauty, of being perfectly conformed to his image, of walking before him with more freedom and peace. In a word, holiness includes *all* that we want. Though we have reason to believe we are pardoned and justified, yet sin is our dishonour, our torment. To be free from the being and influence of sin, we must be in a world where no sin is; but though we do not expect to attain the perfection of heaven till we get there, we are conscious of desiring, and that sometimes intensely, to be more holy. Holiness is the element of the Divine life in the soul of man, out of which no Christian can prosper. O for holiness! for that holiness of which the Holy Ghost is the author, which is beauty in God's eye, and power in man's heart!

"Though I feel my sufferings painful,
 Worn in body, faint in mind,
 Welcome will they prove, and gainful,
 If they work the end designed;
 Make it, Lord, my hourly prayer,
 In thy holiness to share."

An old writer says, "Holiness indeed, in itself, is a most desirable thing: for whatsoever is eminent and excellent, desirable and delightful, amiable and admirable, may be said of holiness. It is the image of God in the soul, a transcript or copy of the Divine nature: it is Christ formed in us: it is the raiment of needle-work, and rich embroidery, with which the King's daughter is clothed withal. It is health in sickness; strength in weakness; joy in sorrow; ease in pain; honour in disgrace; plenty in want; liberty in restraint; company in solitude; light in darkness; life in death. Without this, had a man the wisdom of Solomon, the treasures of David, the beauty of Absalom, the eloquence of Apollos, the knowledge of Paul, the moral perfections of the most accomplished heathens, yet he were but an ignoble, inconsiderable, worthless creature, comparatively. This is the jewel in the crown, the diamond in the ring, the enamel of nature, the lustre of all our gifts, and the perfection of the whole man. It is the beauty of families, the strength of cities, the bulwarks of a nation, the ornament of all societies, the crown of the church militant, and the glory of the church triumphant." O for holiness! for that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord!" We were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we might be holy.

Christ redeemed us from sin that we might be holy. We were ordained to everlasting life through sanctification of the Spirit. The doctrines and promises of the Gospel are all holy in their nature, and purifying in their influence. God commands us to be holy. The cross is holy in its attractions and instructions. A view of the cross gives us such discoveries of the loathsomeness of sin, as we cannot obtain through any other medium. The cross, being the mirror of God's spotless purity, throws light on the pollution of human nature; and the heart that has fellowship with the sufferings of Christ, must hold in utter detestation the monster that caused his heart to bleed. But for sin, but for *our* sin, he would never have tasted grief, nor have suffered death. By sin he was oppressed, wounded, degraded; and can we admit to our hearts the foe that sat like a vampire upon the vitals of our Lord? Can we contemplate his sufferings, partake their fruits, and smile at the cause of them at the same time? Impossible! "He gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God." Gal. i. 4. And who that knows what sin is, and what it has done, can be otherwise than anxious that its guilt may be expiated and its power destroyed? To pardon sin, is to weaken it; and a sense of pardon, is its

dethronement. Unforgiven iniquity is without any real restraint, and it may in a moment, though apparently without strength, rear its head and ride rough-shod over the soul. Nothing so effectually tends to mortify sin, as a consciousness that God, for Christ's sake, hath pardoned it. "There is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared; but there is no hope of our having power over sin, apart from faith in the Redeemer's death. Sin is blotted out by the blood of the Lamb; and that which purges away our guilt, is used by the Holy Spirit to cleanse the conscience from pollution. But as the truth that sanctifies has its auxiliaries, the rod is as essential as the word. Providence subserves the purposes of grace; and the heart, by the discipline of trial, is prepared for the reception of spiritual blessings. "He afflicts us for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness,"—the very blessing we are anxious to possess.

III. It therefore clearly appears that when God afflicts us, he is doing the thing we wish him to do—yea, the very thing we ask him to do. He sometimes answers us by terrible things in righteousness; but when the answer comes in this way, he sends it, and he sends it at our request. When we pray for spiritual blessings, if we are sincere, and do indeed desire them, we are uncon-

cerned about the way in which they may come. This is comparatively a matter of indifference. Being anxious to receive the mercies he has promised to impart, we do not allow the means he may employ to convey them, to trouble us.

“O to be brought to Jesus’ feet,
Though sorrows fix me there!”

“He, the Christian, does not know in what channel God may convey the answer to prayer: it may be in a way very different from what he has expected; with that he has nothing to do.”* It would be presumption for us to prescribe a method by which the purposes of God should be accomplished. This we must leave with him; and in doing it, we are consulting our own peace and safety.

Were the Lord to say—“you shall have the answer to prayer; about that I am determined; but you shall choose the time when the answer shall come, and mark out the path in which my Spirit shall come with it”—should we not be in great perplexity? or, if we decided, should we not be almost sure to fix upon the wrong moment and the wrong method? If we do not know what to pray for, we cannot know the best means of obtaining our request. Who would prefer a rough

path to a smooth one? Yet the rough one is often the safest, and therefore the best. Were we left to the decisions of our own minds, notwithstanding all that God has said about the necessity and advantages of affliction, should we ever be tried? Mental suffering and bodily pain are repugnant to us; and who would not escape both if he could? But the absence of trouble would neither facilitate the spirituality of our minds, nor permanently increase our happiness. Just as the flesh is wounded, the spirit is healed; and the mount of danger is the place of deliverance. We are not left to select the means of our spiritual training, any more than we are allowed to choose our providential heritage. The Lord provides for us, and judges for us in all things. He determines the path that shall be trodden, and the burden that shall be borne; and his determinations are so wise and so gracious, that they must be considered the best and the kindest that could be formed, both as to the purposes themselves and the mode of their accomplishment.

So far, then, from afflictions being at variance with our interests or desires, they are actually in harmony with both. "Good is written upon all we receive from him." Yes, when the Lord tries us, he is doing his own work to realise the desires which his Spirit has created. He fulfils his own

purposes, and answers our requests at the same time. Why, then, do we not thankfully adore him, even when he smites us? Why should we ever be dissatisfied with his ways? We ask him to purify our hearts, and to teach us his truth, which prayer he graciously answers; but because he puts us into the furnace to take our dross away, we are sometimes inclined to think that his hand is turned against us, and that his faithfulness has failed. Strange inconsistency! for by sanctified trial, more than by any other disciplinary means, he increases our conformity to the image of his Son, and introduces us to scenes and pleasures, which, but for adversity, the eye would never see, the heart would never enjoy. It has been said that “prayer is often answered by crosses;” and one of the Olney hymns was composed under that impression. Whether this be strictly true, we do not stay to determine; otherwise we might inquire, whether, when God has given to his people the very opposite of that which they asked for, he can be said to have answered their prayers? Still, almost every tried Christian, at some period of his life, adopts the poet’s strains—

“ I ask’d the Lord that I might grow
In faith and love, and every grace,
Might more of his salvation know,
And seek, more earnestly, his face.

'Twas he who taught me thus to pray,
And he, I trust, has answered prayer ;
But it has been in such a way
As almost drove me to despair.

Yea, more, with his own hand he seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe,
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

Lord, why is this ? I trembling cried,
Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death ?
'Tis in this way, the Lord replied,
I answer prayer for grace and faith.

These inward trials I employ,
From self and sin to set thee free ;
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou may'st seek thy all in me."

All this is the experience of many of the children of Zion. Growth in grace is earnestly desired and importunately sought by every believer ; and when secured, in answer to prayer, it may be considered a realised evidence of God's love, notwithstanding the afflictions and fears that may have intervened between the offered prayer and the answered prayer. The crossing of our designs, the blasting of our gourds, is not, strictly speaking, the answer to prayer, because we never ask God to do this ; but it is the way in which he grants the desires of our hearts ; and he does it in this way, that, in addition to the blessings we

actually seek, he may add others, or awaken desires for others; and thus convince us that as he is able, so he is willing, "to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Eph. iii. 20. He satisfies the soul, and increases its spiritual thirst at the same moment. He teaches one lesson, and prepares the heart to learn a second by the same process. The opening of one truth to the mind is an inlet to the power and preciousness of another. He does not allow his mercy to be circumscribed by the narrow circle within which we are willing it should move. He does more than we expect. He interprets our prayers, not so much by the phraseology we employ, or even by the feelings of which words are imperfect utterances, as by the knowledge he has of our actual condition, and by the immensity of those resources from which he intends to supply our need. Matthew Henry says, "God is always as good as his word, and sometimes better." But then he must so pour his mercy forth as to convince us that his exuberant kindness is all undeserved, and that it rolls on to our hearts in one direction, that, in another, it may bear us back to the ocean from which it came. In Christ there is peace for the troubled mind; his love is a refuge in every storm; and inward trials as well as outward are employed to set us free from

self and sin, that we may seek and find our all in him alone. In human nature there is such a propensity to seek rest in the creature rather than in the Creator, that he is often obliged to cast a veil over his beauteous works, that we may gaze on the brighter glories of his person, and walk in the light which his holiness alone can supply. "Lean, then, on this truth, that even your present darkness and desertion of spirit is accomplishing the gracious will and purpose of the Lord in the purifying of your nature. Is it not a strong support to patience and submission, to know, that even the most painful of all trials is working out for you the most blessed of all ends? It is not the will of God that any one should be unholy. Here, then, is an everlasting basis. It cannot fail. God is unchangeable. He never will choose, or appoint, or approve, anything connected with sin. Behold, then, on what an indestructible foundation you may build your hopes, when you sigh and cry for freedom from every plague of the heart. Your prayer is acceptable to the Lord God. He will assuredly answer it; but in his own time and in his own way. That time you will one day acknowledge to have been right and seasonable—not a moment sooner, nor a moment later, than it ought to have been. That way you will recognise to have been the best and safest by

which *you*, with your peculiar temperament, and in your particular circumstances of life, could have been conducted from sin to holiness, from earth to heaven.”*

My dear Christian friend, your trials bear a nearer relation to believing prayer than perhaps you have been in the habit of considering; and if the hints here submitted to your attention should impress your mind with the fact that your afflictions are the means by which God answers your requests, I shall not have written in vain. Will you give this subject due consideration? It will amply repay you.

“To do thy will—thy yoke to wear,
Thy likeness to receive;
This, this I ask, with ceaseless prayer,—
The means to *thee* I leave.

If such a heart as mine require
Much of distress and pain;
Oh, let the purifying fire
Be kindled not in vain.

Let self and sin no more revive,
My will be blest in thine;
Till thou alone in me shalt live,
And nought be left of mine.”

* Stevenson.

CHAPTER XI.

THE UNITY OF GOD'S PROCEDURE ILLUSTRATED BY THE
VARIETY OF HIS DISPENSATIONS.

It is important to distinguish, in all cases, where we can do so, between those events which are appointed, and those which are only permitted. About some we cannot entertain a moment's doubt; we are sure that God never decreed them, and we are equally sure that without his permission they could not have occurred.

As in the beginning, he made all things good, so he could, if it had been his pleasure, have preserved his works in their original beauty and harmony. This, however, was not his will. He allowed the flood-gates of evil to be opened, and the world to be deluged with woe. But the evil thus introduced, though not, strictly speaking, under his direction—for "let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God"—is under his restraint, and he overrules it for his own glory. Out of confusion he brings order. Injuries are converted into benefits. The destruction

of the temple is the occasion of its being re-reared with greater magnificence, and upon a surer foundation. He makes the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of that wrath he restrains. The universe came from his plastic hand a perfect model of his wisdom and goodness; and being the Governor of his own world, it can excite no surprise that he should take the elements of evil which were subsequently introduced under his control, and turn them to his own honour, and to the confusion of the being who introduced them. Is Satan so to disturb God's works that their order can never be restored? Is he to be left on the shattered throne of the moral empire he has spoiled, to feel, and to exult in the feeling, that he has caused everlasting disappointment in the mind of the Being from whom he revolted? This, indeed, would gratify his malicious desires. But this cannot be. A conflict commenced between the powers of light and the powers of darkness when the serpent induced Eve to pluck the forbidden fruit; and this conflict has been sustained from that moment to the present. The precise period of its termination is unknown, but its final issue will be tremendously awful and glorious. The prince of darkness, with all his confederated hosts, shall be cast into the bottomless pit; and from the overthrow there will arise

undying hallelujahs of triumph, more melodious, and more honouring to Him, to whose glory they will be raised, than if the war-note had never been sounded, or the lance had never been flung. "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen. Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her. And I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God. And again they said, Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." Rev. xix.

So even with those afflictions which the Lord permits for the trial of our faith, and for the increase of our purity—we shall rise out of them all the happier, and the more thankful, for having entered them.

I. It must be remembered that the variety of God's methods, is no argument against the unity of his designs. Variety of arrangement and combination in the natural world is almost infinite, yet the law by which the whole is ordered is one

of the most fruitful sources of our gratification. For example—light, with its tinges and shadings ; air, with its endless and harmonious modifications of sound ; vegetation, with its process and its produce ; animal life, with its higher, with its lower, and with its intermediate forms and orders of being ; science, with its elementary principles, with its established laws, and with its ancient and modern discoveries ; and art, with its arranging skill and controlling power—teach us, yes, all these teach us the goodness of that glorious Being who delights in the happiness of his creatures. From the sun in the firmament, to the glow-worm on the bank ; from the oak, to the osier ; from the finest ranunculus, to the coarsest fungus ; from the whale of the ocean to the roach of the lake, how great is the variety, and how interesting, too ! The alternation of the seasons ; the changes of the weather ; the waxing and waning of the moon ; the transition from “night to morn, and from morn to dewy eve,” are both pleasing and instructive. The hill and the dale ; the forest of trees, and the bed of roses ; the soft scenery of the west, and the bold, rugged landscape of the north ; the cultivated field ; the blooming orchard ; the furzy heath ; the green meadow ; the garden of flowers ; all alike contribute to man’s pleasure. The rippling stream ; the meandering river ; the great

and wide sea; the boundless ocean; bespeak the Creator's concern for the happiness of his creatures. Were the surface of the earth an entire plain, or were rocks and mountains, of the same form and height, cast up at equal distances; did each country possess the natural resources of all; had we no exotics in our soil, no foreign fruit on our table; did we grow the raw material we manufacture; were our markets independent of foreign supplies on the one hand, and of demand on the other; were nations under no obligations to each other; should we not be deprived, and others with us, of a thousand sources of gratification, which are now open to us all? "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever: the Lord shall rejoice in his works." Psa. civ. 24—31. The varied manifestations of God's beneficence are intended, amongst other objects, to relieve the human family of that dull monotony of scene and occupation, which, but for these apparently diversified expressions of his will, all must have witnessed and endured. Variety, then, in the natural world, is loud and conclusive in its testimony to the unity of *his* designs "whose

are the heavens, but who has given the earth to the children of men.”

II. The same remark applies to providence. Diversity here is proof of unity. Suppose we were all led in the same path, and were exercised precisely in the same way; suppose, further, that we all had the same amount of care and comfort—were none rich, or were all rich; could a friend offer a friend nothing that he did not possess; were there no distinctions in civil society—were the usages and circumstances of social life invariably the same; would this, we ask, contribute to the happiness of the entire family of man? The flow of our sympathies would then be arrested; there would be no scope for the exercise of our charities; the warm emotions of benevolence in our bosoms would be chilled; we should be deprived of the joy which gratitude enkindles; some of the noblest deeds of our moral nature, and which have taught the world that man, though in ruins, is great, would cease to be performed; and the pleasure of giving and of receiving would be alike unknown. Where, then, would be the social brotherhood which now links man to man, and all men to God; and which, while it creates interests, endears them, by causing reciprocal expressions of friendship and love? Alas! it would no longer exist, and man would be an

isolated, unhappy being: either he would have wants which his friends could not supply, or possessions which his neighbour would not care to accept. Minds are differently constituted; there is great diversity in the circumstances of men; families, communities, and nations have their peculiar characteristics; but all this subserves the merciful designs of our compassionate God, who gives his children the opportunity of gratifying themselves, by imparting to the necessities of those about them. "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. He sends his rain upon the just and upon the unjust." And to the extent of their ability, the children are to be kind and merciful, even as their Father which is in heaven is merciful. Matt. v. 44—48. "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

III. We must consider the bearings of this sentiment on the church; for to the church it most certainly applies, how heavy soever may be her sufferings.

Just look at it, then, in this light. The church of Christ is one—one in all the essential principles of her existence; one in her hopes, purposes, enjoyments, privileges, and obligations. One Christian is to take an interest in another, and all are to be concerned for the Saviour's glory. Our

natural endowments, our acquired abilities, our religious knowledge and experience, are as much for others as for ourselves. They are for our own comfort and use, certainly; but not exclusively so; nor are they ours at all, apart from the benefit of those about us, for whose souls we are to care, and to whose wants we are of our substance to minister. Nothing in the world of nature exists for its own sake. The sun shines not, the wind blows not, the rain falls not, simply for itself. And in the church, where every gift and every grace are to be subject to the law of love, selfishness is to have no place. One Spirit lives in the church; one shield defends the church; the interests of the church, from the lowest of those which are temporal, to the highest of those which are spiritual, up to the loftiest of all, those which are eternal, are one. One brother is to live, labour, and pray, for another; and he who imparts, whether it be "the cup of cold water," or the "word in season," may expect to receive it back again, should he ever need it. God's designs of love relate to the entire church, not simply to a part of it; and by blessing one member, he intends to bless many. It is impossible to say where the influence of Christian love shall stay its progress. When a brother's part is performed, a power goes forth which may be felt through several

generations. The chain of causes is so connected, that it conveys the touch of love and the sound of mercy from heart to heart, from family to family, from island to continent, and from thence to the very ends of the earth : so that, whenever we are taught and comforted, we should feel our responsibility to man as well as to God. Yes, and when we are afflicted, too ; for trials, as well as mercies, increase accountableness.

To say that God ever deals unkindly with one Christian for the benefit of another, is to affirm what is not true ; and to say that he always afflicts him for his own personal advantage, irrespective of the welfare of others, is an affirmation which cannot be sustained. Many of Paul's sufferings were for the benefit of others ; for he said to the Corinthians, " Whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation." 2 Cor. i. 6. He told the Ephesians, also, that they were not to faint at his tribulation for them, which was their glory. Eph. iii. 13. And what may be true in Paul's case, may be true in ours. There may be some about us, either in the family, or in the church, or in the world, whom God may intend to benefit by our afflictions. Should it be so, shall we not for their sakes take up our cross with thankfulness ? Our sufferings may be the very

kind of agency by which they can be profited—the means that are best adapted to do them good—better adapted than even their own sufferings would be. From love to them, therefore, and from a desire to bless our souls at the same time, God afflicts *us*. He accomplishes his purposes by narrowing his instrumentality. He makes one heart the platform of his love, from which he speaks to many; and upon which he exhibits and illustrates the great things of his law and the glories of his kingdom.

This manifestation of his mercy, however, depends on the spirit in which affliction is borne by his tried people, and on the fruits that result from it. A contented, patient, happy sufferer is a throne from which there goes forth the law of the Lord with so much authority and power, as to subdue rebellion, impatience, and fear in other minds. The sufferer is the spectacle they contemplate; and connecting the spirit he evinces, with the grace that supports him, they are either for the first time impressed with the importance and value of religion, or their faith in the truth of the Gospel is greatly confirmed. The fortitude of some Christian sufferers, and the calmness, the cheerfulness, the hope of others, have taught many a young believer both his duty and privilege;

have inspired the timid with courage; have established the wavering; have armed the warrior for his conflicts; and have set the captive free.

Counsel, consolation, and encouragement are often imparted to one Christian through the sufferings of another; so that your trials, afflicted believer, may be designed for the benefit of those about you, and for *their* benefit whom you may have tried in vain by other means to bless. They may have disregarded your advice, have despised your warnings, have trifled with your prayers, have borne up against the rebuke which your contentedness may have administered to their impatience. None of the plans you have adopted to benefit them may have succeeded; and whatever faith you may have in human instrumentality, as employed by others, you may begin to doubt its efficiency as used by yourself. May not God, then, employ your sufferings to accomplish what your active services have failed to effect? He may be about taking the work into his own hands; making you, not the working, but the passive, suffering agent of accomplishing his will. It is much more difficult to suffer for Christ, than to work for him—to bear his will than to do it; your patient endurance of tribulation, therefore, will convey to their hearts a more powerful testimony to the Gospel than your active zeal ever did, and may place them

in difficulties, from which they will be unable to make their escape, except by a personal surrender to his authority.

And would you not suffer, most cheerfully, to bring about these happy results? You have often entreated the Lord to make you the instrument of converting and of comforting those about you, especially those whom you love with pure and strong affection; and he may adopt the method to answer your prayers for others, which you were told in the last chapter he often adopted to answer those which you offer for yourselves. Why should he not? If he does, you will have no reason to complain. But you say, Could I be assured that these would be the results of my afflictions, I could bear them; but I do not know that this will be the case. No, indeed, you do not know that through your wounds the great Physician *will* convey balm to the wounds of others. He may do it. He has done it, and done it often; and this should lead you to hope he may do it again. You have asked him, if not to make you the means of saving them, yet to save them, and to glorify his grace and his power in their salvation; why should you not, then, expect that his Spirit will employ your sufferings and your state of mind, while passing through them, to accomplish this purpose? And if you have hope in this

matter, it will make you very watchful over your temper and conduct, your words and actions, lest, by distrusting God yourself, you should justify their unbelief—lest, by rebelling, you should encourage them to rebel. You will be anxious so to demean yourself in affliction, that those about you shall be constrained to confess that the Son of God is with you of a truth.

“What if the great God designs that others who look on, should have the benefit of my example and good behaviour under such a trial as this? Has he not a right to use me for such a purpose? and does it not become me to comport with it, and to behave accordingly? Job lost his children, his estate, his health, and, in some measure, his reputation, with his friends; his ease and peace; and all this to show the world a pattern of patience: and shall others have no benefit from the example of our behaviour?”* “Many an aged disciple, who is completely disabled by infirmities, is apt to wonder why he is still preserved in life when his usefulness is apparently gone. But he who considers that the greatest usefulness consists in glorifying God, will see, at a single glance, that there is no ground for such thoughts as these. In regard even to present usefulness, and without

* Grosvenor's “Mourner.”

reference to the future service for which affliction may be preparing them, they may glorify God as much by patient suffering as by active service; and may thus be in the highest degree useful to those who are around them. The mere consideration of their sufferings may impress many a salutary lesson on the minds of others, especially of the young; while the active and consistent exercise of their Christian graces, in such circumstances, may afford an example of religion, in its sustaining power, such as is admirably fitted to commend it to the acceptance of their friends. Thus even the aged sufferer, disabled as he is from active duty, may be a powerful witness for Christ; and although he has no prospect of being restored to his former sphere of exertion, he is occupying, with good and beneficial effect, the post which the Lord has assigned him.”*

In this way, it may be observed, God illustrates and establishes the unity of his designs, and does the Christian good upon a large scale. The church is improved by her trials; and as he who suffers for only one member, contributes to the purity, peace, and power of the whole body, they whom he benefits, must, in their turn, contribute to his holiness and joy. He is a medium of

* Buchanan.

mercy to them, and they are mediums of mercy to him. In their edification he must take an interest. Their improvement is a means of improving him. At their repentance he tunes his harp to sweeter sounds; and as their sorrow merges into his joy, the tide of his pleasure, swelled by the prayers and praises of those who have found mercy, rolls on, widening and deepening as it flows.

Oh, my brethren, it is your honour, and you ought to regard it as your happiness, to suffer for the church; for in suffering that the Saviour's disciples may be instructed and encouraged, you suffer for him and for his cause: and if you can in this way glorify him, by advancing his kingdom, will you not esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the world? The ways by which the progress of the gospel is promoted are many. God is not confined to one mode of operation; and the sufferings of the church have often been the means of its purification and enlargement. The purposes of Christ, when he came into our world, though profound, were simple and harmonious; and their unity gave an interest to every tear he shed, to every word he uttered, to every prayer he offered, to every miracle he performed. His eye was upon one object, and to its attainment his whole soul was

devoted. From the vast circumference of means there lay in every direction a line of influence to the centre, each and all of which he traced by sympathy or by toil, laying every thing he touched under contribution to the cause to which he was pledged. But all he said and did was marked by self-denial. He pleased not himself. He made himself of no reputation, but became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. By dying, he procured pardon for sinners already dead in trespasses and sins; and by sinking under the curse, he secured the elevation of millions to the throne. All his sorrows and sacrifices were for the benefit of others; for their salvation in time, for their felicity through eternity. He made an end of sin, brought in an everlasting righteousness, and trod a chequered path, that, from the goal to which it conducted him, he might issue his high commissions of mercy, dispense his munificent favours to the worthless and needy, and stretch out the hand of his power to help all who might seek his aid. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted; yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." Isa. liii. 7. When the interests of his people required his attention, he shrank not from the

conflict ; and when the Father caused to meet on him their iniquities, no murmur, or complaining word, escaped his lips. He patiently endured the cross, and meekly received the blow. He drank the cup, desired the baptism that awaited him, and flew to the rescue of those who had dishonoured his name.

Is it then too much, to ask those whose sins he bore, to endure the chastisement his love appoints ? The designs of his death harmonise with the arrangements of his providence ; the unity of his purposes must, therefore, secure from *their* sufferings, as well as from his own, great and permanent good. The love that constituted him the Saviour of the lost, may surely be trusted with the minor affairs of this life, especially since he hath declared that “all things work together for good to them that love God.” Without this special declaration, simply from the general view which the Scriptures give us of the character and government of God, we might assure ourselves that the darkest dispensations will end propitiously ; but with this explicit announcement, our comforts are made doubly strong. “Things work together,” not alone ; and the roughest as well as the smoothest are essential to the co-operation of the whole. One trial, unconnected with another, might be an injury ; and even those circumstances

which we regard as merciful, might, without those we look upon as adverse, seriously injure us. The working of all things together, is the guarantee that no one thing can injure us, if we be followers of that which is good. The mercy that elevates, renders necessary the trial that humbles us ; and the affliction that awakens our fears, draws to our hearts the consolation that revives our hopes. And not only so ; for one trial renders another trial necessary. By *this* affliction, the existence of principle is ascertained, by *that* it is tested ; by one it is developed, by another it is established.

“There is a near resemblance between the works of God in his creation, and his work of grace in the soul : that is, there is a like kind of design and management in both. For instance,—If the air around us, and the waters which are upon the surface of the earth, were always in a still, quiet, unruffled state, they would become unfit for the purposes of health and life. That their purity may be preserved or restored, they must be agitated by occasional winds and storms. So it is in the spiritual world. The soul seems incapable of flourishing in a perpetual calm. Hence at the Lord’s word, the stormy wind ariseth ; tribulation of different kinds and degrees are sent ; bodily sickness, or the sickness or death of friends ; losses, disappointments, persecutions,

revilings ;—these or other trials, are the tempests appointed by the Lord's wisdom and loving-kindness ; and they are commissioned to beat down worldliness in the heart, to dethrone self, to drive away carelessness, to give the believer no rest till he find it in his God and Saviour."*

“ One prayer I have,—all prayers in one,—
 When I am wholly thine ;
 Thy will, my God, thy will be done,
 And let that will be mine.

All-wise, almighty, and all-good,
 In thee I firmly trust ;
 Thy ways, unknown or understood,
 Are merciful and just.

May I remember, that to thee,
 Whate'er I have, I owe ;
 And back in gratitude from me,
 May all thy bounties flow.

My gifts are only then enjoyed,
 When used as talents lent :
 Those talents only well employed,
 When in thy service spent.

And though thy wisdom takes away,
 Shall I arraign thy will ?
 No, let me bless thy name, and say,
 The Lord is gracious still.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE RELATION WHICH THE CHRISTIAN'S AFFLICTIONS ON
EARTH BEAR TO HIS REST IN HEAVEN.

AFFLICTIONS are sure. Man is born unto trouble. The Saviour will have the sympathies of his people, as well in relation to the sorrows he endured, as to the rest he now enjoys. He has promised to be with them, and to give them an experimental knowledge of his power and love; and by their trials he intends to make them somewhat conscious of the experience he himself had of the sorrows of life. By poverty, he teaches the poor some of his privations, when he had not where to lay his head. By temptation, he teaches another how sorely he was assaulted, when, for forty days in the wilderness, he was tempted of the devil. By persecution and reproaches, he teaches another how deeply he was injured in his reputation. By desertion, he teaches others the gloom that rested upon his spirit, when his friends forsook him and his Father withdrew from him the light of his

countenance. By bodily suffering, he gives to others a taste of the anguish he endured in his flesh. Many were his sorrows, and many are the afflictions of his people. Isa. liii. Psa. xxxiv. 19.

“The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown.
No trav’ller ever reached that blest abode,
Who found not thorns and briars in his road.”

Those who approximate the nearest to Jesus in moral beauty, are sometimes the most entirely conformed to him in suffering. The excellent, in whom is all his delight, do groan, being burdened. The apostle Paul was pressed out of measure, above strength, so that he despaired even of life. 2 Cor. i. 8. Hezekiah was oppressed, and he prayed God to undertake his cause. Isa. xxxviii. 13, 14. The children of Israel sighed by reason of their bondage. Exod. ii. 24. Job groaned in his complaint, and made a noise. Job xxiii. 2. David said, “All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.” Psa. xlii. 7. Jeremiah exclaimed, “I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath—He hath inclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked.” Lam. iii. 1, 9. And the people of God, even in these merciful times, are frequently in heaviness, through manifold temptations. 1 Pet. i. 6. But

what a mercy for afflicted Christians that God has engaged to bless them *in* their trials, and to deliver them out of them all! Yes—and if they follow the dictates of revelation, and judge with those who reached their decisions under the direction of God's unerring Spirit, their consolations will be strong, and their prospects bright. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look, not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. The afflictions of the Christian on earth bear an interesting relation to his rest in heaven.

I. We learn from the apostle's statement, that our afflictions are light. They are felt to be heavy, and we are sometimes oppressed by them; but there are senses in which the heaviest of them may be considered light.

1. Viewed in connexion with our deserts, they are light. The term is comparative. One Christian treads a rougher path than another; "some seem to ride to heaven in state, while others trudge on foot," and travel home under circumstances of great perplexity. Were the privations and sufferings of some believers to be related to those of their brethren to whom God hath appointed a full

measure of worldly comfort, great would be their surprise. Living in plenty themselves, not having to mourn over a single unsupplied want, having pecuniary resources at command, they know nothing of some of the corroding cares of their companions in the faith. Into their ears the cry of want, from children and dependants, is never poured; the quiet of their homes is but seldom disturbed by a groan from within, or by a storm from without. "The lines are fallen to them in pleasant places; and they have a goodly heritage." Not that they pluck thornless roses, or taste honey without gall. The heart knoweth its own bitterness; and *whose* lot is without a crook? Comparatively only they are without care. But in this sense their circumstances are most merciful. Some Christians scarcely know what it is to be free from trouble. Wave after wave rolls over them. One storm is succeeded by another in quick succession. They eat their bread with weeping, and wet their couch with tears. Their sorrows are known to God; and, perhaps, to him only. Reserved in their dispositions, and their sphere of action lying in the shades of society, they do not obtrude their dark picture on the public gaze. And even if they told their tale, it might excite but little sympathy; or those who heard it might be unable to afford the counsel and help which they knew

were needed. There are times when God teaches his people the folly of the wisest, and the feebleness of the strongest of men. Anything short of his direct interposition leaves the case untouched. Tears there are which only his hand can wipe away, burdens which his arm alone can sustain, depths which only his infinite love can reach. A Christian in trouble requires, and is thankful for a brother's kind expressions of concern for his welfare. Still, he waits upon God, exclaiming, "Give me help from trouble, for vain is the help of man."

But in the saddest of our moments, when tempests are at their height, when we seem to be threatened on every hand with ruin, and when the hour of destruction appears to draw nigh, we must confess, even then, that, compared with our deservings, our afflictions are light indeed. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities," *Psa. ciii. 10*; and did we think more correctly of our deserts, we should think more highly of our mercies. Anything on this side heaven is more than we deserve; anything on this side hell is less than we deserve. The wages of sin is death; and having done the work, we might righteously be summoned to receive the reward. Eternal misery is our due. Were we cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brim-

stone, we should not have the semblance of a reason to complain. Sin is an infinite evil, though committed by finite creatures; and our desert, as sinners, is infinite punishment.

But we are not in hell, nor are we on the road that leads to it. Christ hath redeemed us from death, the Holy Spirit hath turned our feet into the path of life, and we are looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. A deep conviction of our guilt will lead us to adore and to be thankful for God's gentle discipline, even when the flesh groans under a load of care.

“Blest Lamb of God, thy sov'reign grace
To all around I'll tell,
Which makes a place in glory mine,
Whose just desert is hell.”

2. Compared with the afflictions of others, ours are light. We have not been cast into a den of lions, nor into a burning fiery furnace; nor have we ever been stretched upon a rack, or immured in a dungeon. But some of the excellent of the earth have. Hear Paul's account of their sufferings: “Women received their dead raised to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had trial of cruel mock-

ings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy :) they wandered in deserts, in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." Heb. xi. 35—38.

And since the days of the apostles, the Lord's witnesses have suffered more than the pen of history has recorded. Barbarous instruments of cruelty have been invented to torture them; and persecution has assumed forms of malignant oppression, which the scientific enmity of the prince of darkness alone could have given to it. In the moral defence of truth, much human blood has been shed; and the ashes of the burnt bodies of God's elect have been scattered by the winds of heaven over sea and land. The earth has groaned under the civil and ecclesiastical injustice of ruthless tyrants, who seemed to think, that at their shrine every knee was to bow, and every conscience was to do homage. The church will not know till the day of judgment, how much her sons and daughters have suffered for the truth; nor, till then, will their persecutors themselves be aware of the awful account they have to render. The wrongs of God's injured church

have yet to be redressed ; and be redressed they will, in the perfect emancipation of truth from all that enfeebles and fetters it,—in the overthrow of all errors which have been used either to weaken the foundation of our hope, or to poison our nutriment,—in the demolition of antichrist, the man of sin—Babylon, the mystical representative of no religion and of false religions,—and in the retributive purgation, or destruction, of those systems which have either inflicted, or sanctioned the infliction of injuries upon the saints of the Most High. “Vengeance belongeth unto God;” he will recompense, and redeem the cause of his servants from the obloquy his enemies have thrown upon it. The cries of the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony they bore to its veracity and power, have long since entered into the ears of the Lord God of sabaoth ; and he will, in his own time, avenge their blood. The battles of the moral world are approaching their crisis, and great will be the slaughter when it arrives ; while over broken thrones, shattered kingdoms, crumbling altars, and wrecked hierarchies, will roll the thundering hallelujahs of the victorious multitude, poured forth from the deepest recesses of their regenerated nature, to the honour of “Him who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.”

O God, make us thankful that the age in which we live is not one of cruelty and blood; that “we sit under our vine and fig-tree, no man daring to make us afraid.”

But we need not dwell on the history of martyred saints, to be convinced that our afflictions are light. There are thousands of God’s redeemed ones, whose depths of sorrow we have never fathomed, whose fires have not touched even the borders of our garments. Were the secrecies of domestic life disclosed, appalling scenes would meet the eye; and by heart-rending tales of woe we should assuredly be stirred up to thankfulness. Our homes are palaces, our supplies are luxuries, compared with the habitations and with the scanty provisions of some, amongst whom, nevertheless, the Lord has his throne. Poor-houses, dispensaries, hospitals, garrets, cellars, call upon us to be thankful; for many whom the Lord loveth, spend there, not days and nights only, but months, and even years. “Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me bless his holy name.” *Psa. ciii. 1.*

3. Then, how light are our trials compared with our supports and consolations!—those I mean which God has promised to his afflicted people, and which are at all times accessible to the prayer of faith. We read of strong consola-

tion, of the everlasting arms, of the well-ordered covenant, of the wall of fire, of the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, of rivers of waters in a dry place, of the eye that never slumbers, of the shield which no dart can penetrate, of the love which knows no change. And we read of all this, of more than this, in connexion with promises, which, as they are yea and amen, cannot deceive,—and with anticipations, which, as they spring from the promises, and are regulated by them, cannot be disappointed. The rod is associated with the bond of the covenant ; the rock, whose waters ever flow, is opened in the wilderness ; the Refiner sits by the crucible to take the gold out of the fire the moment the process of purification is sufficiently advanced. To the sorrowful, the Holy Ghost is a Comforter, whose power, love, and patience qualify him for the office. To the tempted, Jesus is a sympathising friend, whose experience of the tempter's subtlety enables him to succour them that are tempted. To the outcast and forlorn, God is a pitiful, merciful Father. The afflicted are precious in Jehovah's sight. He does not despise nor abhor the afflictions of the afflicted. If he ever speak with tenderness, it is to the afflicted ; if he ever open his whole heart, it is to the afflicted. He wipes away the tear, and listens to the sigh of the

afflicted. The afflicted are folded in his arms, or caressed at his side. If there be a spot, or a stream, in his pasture, more fertile or refreshing than another, to that stream and to that spot the Shepherd always leads "the flock of slaughter." To a wise earthly parent, all his children are alike dear; partiality of love is a form of affection of which he knows nothing: but if there be a child toward whom maternal anxiety flows with ever-deepening love, is it not toward the afflicted one? The anxious look, the expressive sob, the repressed emotion, of the little sufferer, go to a mother's heart, with a point and a power, of which her unwearied attention, her gentle step, her sleepless eye, her soothing voice, are intelligent and expressive utterances. And is there a Christian towards whom the yearnings of infinite love flow with special tenderness and power,—first in the kind admonition, then in the gracious promise, then in the wise counsel, and, lastly, in the actual impartation of the grace which allays fear, revives hope, increases faith, and augments joy? they are all turned toward the afflicted Christian. "The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness." Psa. xli. 3. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem." Isa. lxvi. 13. Yes,

but a mother's love for her suffering child is only a faint illustration of God's care over his afflicted children. "Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains; for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion upon the son of her womb? yea, they may forget; yet will I not forget thee." Isa. xlix. 13—15.

Are these our consolations? Then are our afflictions light indeed! "My question," said Mrs. Hawkes, "is not, wherefore am I so greatly afflicted? but, why am I afflicted no more?" "I will now," writes a reflecting believer, "take a view of Christian life as a whole. If it has its pleasures, it has likewise its pains. It is a scene of trial, a state of discipline. 'What son is he when the father chasteneth not?' I am conscious, however, that while 'innumerable evils compass me about,' the chastisements I endure are comparatively slight and few. The former are as countless as the waves of the sea; the latter are as rare as the storms that beat upon its breast. The former are as numerous as the leaves of the forest; the latter as occasional as the lightning that scathes its trees. I have to recollect also

that my follies are not only many, but aggravated, while the chastisements of God are not only few, but beneficial; never intended to be injurious, but instructive and amendatory, and always actually so when sanctified by the Spirit of grace. Pining sickness, family bereavement, and temporal losses, have brought home to my mind, with all the force of a sensible conviction, the vanity of the world, and the value of religion. I have been brought to see the folly, as I never saw it before, involved in the two great evils, that of forsaking the 'fountain of living waters,' and that of constructing 'broken cisterns which can hold no water.' Thus, taught by the correcting hand of God, and acting in accordance with the teaching, that the 'time past of life has sufficed' to have walked negligently, the time present has been more wisely employed. As, then, he chasteneth me, not for his pleasure, but for my profit, 'I will sing of mercy and judgment; unto thee, O Lord, will I sing.' I ought to be dissatisfied with myself, till I am brought into a state of thankful submission to the 'Father of spirits;' for no principle but one of good-will, no motive but one to promote my best interests, can actuate him in his dealings with me."

II. Our afflictions, the apostle tells us, are "but for a moment." They are certainly not for

ever. An end must come to them all. They are for a night only; and for a night whose duration bears no proportion to the day that follows it. "A moment,"—not a year, nor a month, nor a day, nor even an hour, is chosen by Paul to mark the duration of our afflictions,—but "a moment," the shortest period into which time is divided. Years are no sooner here than they are gone. With what rapidity, then, do the seconds of an hour fly away! Yet the sharpest of our sorrows are only for a moment, a space of time consumed by the breath employed to describe its brevity. The song, the crown, the rest, in heaven, are for ever: eternal life is "the inheritance of the saints in light"—their portion is "incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away." But our sufferings are as transitory as the moment. Their pressure is often great; but as the thought rises in the mind, they are not for ever, the burden instantly becomes lighter. "Our life is but a vapour, which appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away." Compared with eternity, threescore years and ten are scarcely a point of time; so that if we suffered from infancy to old age, the anguish would be but for a moment. The proportion of the longest life to eternity is less than that of an hour to an age. Life must close, and with it must terminate all conflicts and

all cares. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Rev. xxi. 4. Yes, the last temptation shall be resisted, the last foe shall be vanquished. And all this may occur soon. At the very time when we think we shall be borne down by our trials, God may arrest their progress for ever. Oh, what a relief is this to the mind!—it calms the soul, and helps it to bear its burdens in peace. My afflictions are not for ever. The storms that threaten to desolate us will soon waste their fury, and the foaming sea shall, at the bidding of Him who is "mightier than many waters," presently rock itself to rest.

Let us, then, by admitting the apostle's thoughts to our minds, give our hearts the full benefit of his reasonings. To him it was a cheering reflection that pain was but for a moment, and that the pleasures of the life to come were eternal; and this thought charmed away much of the gloom that would otherwise have rested upon his spirit, and opened to him sources of refreshing consolation. And those who have passed from the toils of earth to the rest of heaven, know perfectly that their affliction *was* light, that it *was* but for a moment. While here, they wept, and—

“ Wrestled hard, as we do now,
With sins, and doubts, and fears.”

But as they look down from their thrones of light upon the path they trod, how short must it appear!—so short that it scarcely admits of being traced—a step, and that is all! As you ministered to their necessities, watched the progress of the disease that undermined their constitutions, observed their sufferings, listened to their sighs, heard them relate the incidents which, one after another, arose to chequer their path, you thought the period long and dreary; and sometimes, perhaps, marvelled, that the hour of dissolution should be protracted. But now that their sufferings are all over, now that you are obliged to think of them, not as combatants, but as victors,—not as exiles, but as children at home, their prolonged calamities appear only as a dream, or as the breeze which sprang up at the Divine bidding to waft the vessel into the harbour. Their days were *anxious*, their nights were *wearisome*, for the hand of the Lord lay heavy upon them; yet, as their trials are now known only as parts of a history, the facts of which a *kind* providence supplied, and which were themselves illustrative of the Saviour’s love, the very recollection of them is pleasant. You cannot bear to think of their crosses as burdens, or of their afflictions as

grievous trials : they appear to you as merciful incidents, about which indeed there *was* obscurity, but which obscurity has all vanished, leaving the trial not a judgment to be mourned over, but a merciful incident to be pondered with thankfulness. You cannot forget their tears and sighs ; but you are convinced that their trials were nothing more than the discipline of love, training them for their present enjoyments and occupations. And what are their own thoughts of the way through which they travelled to their kingdoms and their thrones ? Do they think that it was long and dreary, and that they had just reason to complain of it ? If Paul, while in the body, and bearing about the marks of the Lord Jesus, considered that his afflictions were but for a moment, how short the period of his earthly toils must appear to him now ! And shall we think our affliction long ? It is not easy to suffer for weeks and years together,—still we must exclaim,

“Light are the pains that nature brings ;
How short our sorrows are,
When with eternal future things,
The present we compare !”

We suffer for a moment only ; and while I am writing and you are reading, that moment may vanish away. Those trials that awaken our fears,

often take their flight, at the very time we apprehend we shall be ruined by them.

Afflicted Christian, let me once more remind you that your afflictions are light, and that they are but for a moment.

III. Then they “work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

Glory is the portion of the sanctified in heaven. It is called a *weight* of glory, in opposition to *light* affliction, and to teach us the substantial, satisfying nature of heavenly felicity. It is an *eternal* weight of glory—a glory that shall never fade, or waste away. When a period, equal to myriads of ages, has passed, and when this has been succeeded by others, and these again by more, the joys of heaven will be no nearer their termination than they will be at the moment we take possession of our rest. Had we an intimation that at some definitely remote period, however distant, our bliss might terminate; or even were the eternity of happiness problematical to the blest themselves,—

“That ghastly thought would drink up all its joys,
And quite unparadise the realms of bliss.”

But glory is an eternal good. “I give unto my sheep *eternal* life, and they shall never perish.”
John x. 28.

Then it is an exceeding, yea, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory :—it far exceeds our sufferings, our thoughts, our desires, our hopes, our faith ! “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” 1 Cor. ii. 9. At present, glory is a mystery. As we must be converted to Christ, to know the blessedness of his people on earth, so we must depart hence and be with Christ, to know the blessedness of his people in heaven. The believer here, in the highest state of spirituality, can have only a faint idea of the enjoyments, services, and fellowship of his glorified brethren. But it is his mercy to know that God is preparing him for their occupations ; and that affliction, no less than the direct work of the Holy Spirit, is a means to this most blessed end. The deepest adversities under which he groans are, by way of influence and result, connected with the highest enjoyments to which he will be advanced, “when mortality is swallowed up of life.” Glory is the home, trial the pathway that leads to it ; and every step he takes on the road is an approximation to the purity and rest which lie beyond all mortal spheres.

“The words of the apostle demonstrate,” observes Buchanan, “the connexion which subsists

betwixt the believer's sufferings on earth and his ultimate happiness in heaven. That such a connexion betwixt these two things subsists—a connexion, similar in some respects, to that which subsisted betwixt the humiliation and exaltation of the Saviour himself; and that our present afflictions are working out for us a result so glorious, may well serve at once to reconcile us to them, and to impress us with a sense of the wisdom and love of God in imposing them. But let us not imagine that they have this efficacy in themselves; as if they either secured or merited for us a future compensation or reward. Far from it. God does not visit us with any affliction beyond our desert—so as to make himself our debtor; neither does any amount of affliction assure us of future glory, except in so far as it is made the means, in God's hand, of bringing the truth home to our hearts, and inducing us cordially to embrace and diligently to improve it. And hence the apostle not only states the fact, that affliction works out for God's people an exceeding weight of glory, but he points out the way in which it does so: 'While,' says he, '*we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*' It is by its influence in wean-

ing our thoughts and affections from the world,
and directing them to spiritual and eternal things,
that adversity tends to prepare us for glory.”

“ In the floods of tribulation,
While the billows o’er me roll,
Jesus whispers consolation,
And supports my fainting soul.
Hallelujah,
Praise the Lord.

All I meet I find assists me
In my path to heavenly joy,
Where, though trials now attend me,
Trials never more annoy :
Hallelujah,
Praise the Lord.

Blest there with a ‘ weight of glory,’
Still the path I’ll ne’er forget,
But, exulting, cry, it led me
To my blessed Saviour’s seat :
Sweet affliction,
Which has brought to Jesus’ feet.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GLORIFIED CHRISTIAN MORE THAN COMPENSATED FOR
ALL HIS AFFLICTIONS.

YES, when the conflict is over, and the prize is obtained, the combatant will be amply rewarded for all the hardships he endured. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Rev. iii. 21.

By this promise, the great "Captain of our salvation" would inspire the spiritual warrior with courage and hope; and when the promise is fulfilled, so great will be the victor's glory, so elevated his triumphs, that he will marvel at the comparative ease with which he fought his way to the kingdom. This is a great promise, a great one of its kind; and one which, if believed, will have a happy influence upon the whole character.

It is a promise of *enthronement*,—he shall be placed upon the throne of conquest and of royalty. His nature shall be enthroned; all that is weak,

grovelling, and earthly about it, shall be removed ; the mind shall lose its obtuseness, the will its perverseness, the heart its carnality, the conscience its insensibility, the memory its treacherousness, the body its corruption ; and the man, the entire man, shall be raised to the fellowship of the blessed in heaven, and to communion with Him, the Blessed One, who first turns the sinner into a saint, and then makes the saint equal unto an angel.

It is the promise of *rest*,—of absolute, undisturbed, eternal repose,—“he shall sit with me.” “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” Heb. iv. 9.

“ When we pass through yonder river,
When we reach the further shore,
There’s an end of war for ever ;
We shall see our foes no more.
All our conflicts then shall cease—
Followed by eternal peace.”

It is the promise of *participation*,—“He shall sit with me in my throne.” He shall have a seat at my side ; he shall share the glories I have obtained ; he shall be arrayed in the beauties in which I am adorned ; my joy shall be his joy ; he shall know my delights, for he shall taste them ; the peace of his mind shall accord with the unruffled tranquillity of mine. He is an heir of God,

and a joint-heir with me of the inheritance which my Father hath awarded me for the obedience I rendered to his dishonoured law, for the harmony I restored to his injured and disturbed government; and there is not an object I contemplate, nor an emotion I feel, but he shall behold and experience with me. The mysteries of my love he shall explore; to the heights of my transports he shall aspire; and from the centre of my blessedness he shall move, never, however, to get beyond its circumference, but to make fresh discoveries of my glory, and for ever to sympathise, deeply, and more perfectly, with all my plans, and with all my discovered and accomplished predictions. His heart shall go with my heart: having intelligent perceptions of my designs, he shall be entirely satisfied with all my ways. "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." John xvii. 24.

This comprehensive prayer which our Lord offered on behalf of his disciples, includes all that we can either desire, or expect to realise. Here, then, we might rest our hopes and feed our meditations; but as the sentiments and weighty sayings of the Great Teacher were understood and

expounded by his apostles, we shall endeavour to reach the mind of the Master through the instructions of one of his inspired servants—a man who knew and taught the Saviour's will respecting the safety and hope of his people. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Rom. viii. 14—18.

I. Before we consider the conclusion which the apostle reaches, we must notice the facts from which he reasons; for these are the points to which he evidently wishes special attention to be given.

1. He reasons from the relation which all true Christians bear to God. They are his children. They are born of the Spirit, are adopted into his family, and introduced to all the privileges of his house. He wishes them to know that they are his; not only his servants, his chosen vessels, but his children: and he wishes them also further to know that he is their Father, and that they are his children, on grounds, and for reasons, which bring them into fellowship with all his

perfections ; and which reasons, when they are understood, will account to them for many of their trials.

Oh, what an honour for sinful creatures, to be called the sons of God ! But how humiliating is our condition as children ! We *are* “children ;” we are, however, “*little* children.” Even those who, compared with others, are fathers in Christ, are, as to age, knowledge, and capacities, but babes in Christ. They have only just begun to live. An eternity of being is stretched out before them, and they have barely taken a step in the march of immortality. How circumscribed is the range of their inquiries ! How little do they know of their Father, or of his love, or of his ways ! “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, 1 Cor. xiii. 11 ; nor will that which is perfect come, till that which is in part shall be done away. Many of their habits are childish ; we smile at them, but they are so grovelling and irregular, that an angel might weep over them. Still it is a mercy to be “children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus,” and to desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby ; for infancy shall merge into childhood, childhood into youth, youth into manhood, and, as men in attainments, and with matured capabilities, we shall occupy our places

in the new Jerusalem. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

God's people are heirs as well as children. They have an inheritance in prospect, their title to it is valid, and it shall one day be theirs in actual possession. It is an inheritance in character with their personal and relative dignity. The Father becomes the portion of the child. He gives all that he can give—himself. He gave his Son to die for them, his Spirit to sanctify them; and then upon them, as his redeemed ones, he bestows himself. He might have given them all but himself; he might have conferred a large amount of good upon them, multiplying their sources of enjoyment, creating one world after another for them to inhabit and inherit, without becoming their portion. But this would neither have expressed his love, nor have satisfied their desires. They thirst for God, nor can they be satisfied without him. And God they have. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul." Lam. iii. 24. Their inheritance is adapted to their nature in its highest state of perfection. All that they can want or enjoy, God will be to them. And when they have full possession of their inheritance, it will realise to their minds all the

descriptions given of heaven in the Bible. It will be found to be an all-sufficient, an exhaustless, an eternal portion. However spiritual their desires, however capacious their minds, there will be enough for them all. If the desires of a thousand hearts could all have place in one heart; if one mind could be as comprehensive as ten thousand minds; and if the number of the saved could be multiplied a myriad-fold, even then the resources of the Infinite One would be infinitely more than adequate to their necessities.

But this is not all. The heirs of God are joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. Whatever he inherits, they shall inherit with him. He and they are to be glorified together; not he without them, nor they without him, but he and they together. His joy and glory will partly consist in having them before him, and with him. Without them he would not be satisfied, because for them his soul travailed, for them his blood was shed, and for them his throne was established. "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one." John xvii. 22. "In my light they shall shine, with my treasures they shall be enriched, with me they shall live and triumph for ever." Glorious inheritance!—worthy of God, and sufficient for his saints.

2. The apostle reasons from the sufferings which precede glory, and from the glory which succeeds suffering. "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Rom. viii. 17.

The term "glory" denotes whatever is great, excellent, pure, and substantial. It is a word which conveys no single idea to our minds. It is an expression, however, which God has employed, and it indicates that full measure of felicity, with its causes and its consequences, which he will impart to his people when Christ "shall appear the second time." Sinners are first saved, then glorified.

The revelation of this glory implies its present concealment. Much indeed is made known unto us in the Scriptures, of the honour, happiness, and triumph of the glorified; and this is God's revelation to his church in the wilderness, respecting the promised land to which they are destined. But he has not made known all that they are to be, and to enjoy. The door of vision is not closed, but it is only partly opened. We see but a little of what we shall behold. A specimen only is given. Nothing more than the outline is drawn. The sounds that reach us, though they come from the deep melodies of happy myriads, fall faintly and indistinctly on our ears.

The revelation of glory, it may be said, is the manifestation of the excellencies of Him from whom heaven derives all its felicity. Without God, even heaven would not be a peaceful, joyful home to the Christian. Hence the glory of God is spoken of in connexion with the perfect happiness of the church, which John saw descending out of heaven. Rev. xxi. 11. Christ prayed that his people might behold his glory. The glory to be revealed is the disclosure that will be made of God's perfections, and of the grace, truth, and love, of Christ's mysterious person. In heaven, something will be seen which we cannot now discern. God's glory will be unfolded before us;—not his essential glory—this will be for ever a concealed mystery. He dwells in inaccessible light. 1 Tim. vi. 16. But through his works, through his church, and especially through his Son, we shall “behold his face in righteousness.” The veil that now hangs before the throne will be removed. The ark of the testimony will be opened. All the seals of the sealed book will be broken. Night with its shadows will vanish away. The noon-day splendour of a world where the sun never sets will disclose inconceivable things, and present objects whose beauty and glory will exceed all that we ever thought or heard.

Besides this, the glory of God will be upon the church, thrown round about her; and, thus arrayed in glory, she will be "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." Eph. v. 27. The soul will be glorious, and so will be the body. "For as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." 1 Cor. xv. 49. The resemblance will be perfect. Each saint will be like Christ; and in each Christ will be seen to shine, and heard to speak. And the glory of one child of light, will be to myriads a source of pure, disinterested pleasure. The glory revealed in one, will be a revelation to another; and as we walk among these suns of the celestial system, our attraction to the centre of their felicity will be more powerful. We shall not only love and adore Christ for what he has done for *us*, but for what we shall know he has done for *others*. Their felicity will increase ours, and their gratitude will swell the tide of our praise. Selfishness will have no place there. We shall regard the good done to our associates, as done to ourselves. Each one will inherit God, and will have free access to his infinite resources. The external delights will accord with the internal, and great will be the harmony of the whole.

The glory is to be "revealed *in us*," and it will

be *clearly* revealed. Each one of the unnumbered millions before the throne, will be a temple, consecrated to the Mediator's service, in which he will be honoured ; and filled with his glory, no name but his will be lauded, no praise but his will be proclaimed. Even here he is formed in our hearts the hope of glory, and we are commanded to be full of the Spirit. But there are feelings within us which he does not enkindle, principles which he does not sustain—"I find another law in my members warring against the law of my mind." Rom. vii. 23. In heaven, however, we shall "be filled with all the fulness of God." The mind will be full of light, and the heart full of love. God will be all to us, and all within us ; there will be nothing in us to displease either him or those about us, or even ourselves. The finished temple will be furnished and adorned. The fires of affection will burn ; the lamp of intelligence will emit its lustre ; the altar of incense will throw up its odours ; sacrifices of praise will be offered ; the oracle will speak ; the trumpet will sound ; about the throne, and before the Almighty Occupant, the heart will do homage ; and the loftiest adorations of a regenerate nature will prolong the worship and perpetuate the song,—“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom,

and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Rev. v. 12.

Then, having received the revelation, it will be our portion. Nor shall we have any fear of losing it. There will be a vivid, powerful consciousness that it is ours, and that it will be ours for ever; and the satisfaction arising from this feeling will be indescribably great. Some of our happiest moments in this world are embittered and disturbed by anxious doubts and fearful forebodings. To some Christians, the greatness of God's gift is a stumbling-block; they cannot think that the glorious things spoken of the city of God can appertain to them. So unworthy do they feel themselves to be of the least of his mercies, that, because he offers them the greatest, they hesitate cordially to accept any. We do not, we cannot, justify either the feelings or the conduct of such Christians; for were it possible for God to give more than he has given, it would be their duty, and ought to be their delight, thankfully and believingly to accept all. We refer to the timidity and hesitancy of some Christians, just that we may have before us, by contrast, the happiness of the church in heaven, where there is no possibility of a doubt ever rising to sadden the spirit or to darken the vision.

Many of God's people in this world are also

tempted to believe that they may lose the grace they have, and never obtain the glory they desire. Through the obscurity that rests upon their minds, they are in heaviness; and, thus harassed, their joy is far from being settled. How pleasing the thought, then, that when at home, "in the house not made with hands," we shall have no doubt about our interest in God's love, and no fear of being banished from his presence. At present we can scarcely conceive how great will be the gratification which a perfect consciousness of the possession of heaven will afford. But we *shall* possess it, and we shall know that it is our own inheritance.

The resources of a glorified state are internal. External, in part, they must be; for in the midst of so much glory, with so many fountains of living water gushing at our side, with so many harps pouring their melody into our ear, with so many companions in worship and service, wherever we turn the eye, or direct our course, some beauteous scene will delight us, some seraph will sing its anthem to cheer us, some sainted pilgrim will tell his tale to instruct us, and, above all, the Lamb in the midst of the throne will feed us, and God will be with us, and be our God. Rev. vii. 17; xxi. 3. And this will be the perfection of bliss. But the external resources of our felicity will be

the internal causes of our satisfaction. We shall not have to look abroad for happiness, nor have to search for bliss. At home in the temple and kingdom in which we shall be priests and kings unto God, we shall be delighted with the sacerdotal and the royal occupations of that holy state: and God, resting in his love towards us, and beholding his perfected image within us, will be at home in our hearts. To his infinite mind, our glorified nature will be a habitation and a throne; while we, retiring into the deep recesses of our being, shall see God and enjoy God there. The Holy Spirit, casting the eye of his complacent love upon the temple he has erected and adorned, will be satisfied; and the finite soul, without being able to comprehend, will inherit the Infinite One. Our home is heaven; our portion, God.

The glory to be revealed in us will be enjoyed. It will be adapted to our nature—to the mind, in its purest and most intelligent state—to the heart, with its most spiritual and enlarged desires. The intellect will gather food for the affections. The feelings will delight the conscience. Between the judgment and the will no disagreement can possibly arise. The balance will be restored to all the elements of our being, never again to be disturbed. Beholding the glory of God, and of

the Lamb, we shall enjoy the love of both, and great will be the delight occasioned by what is seen and felt. The admission of light to the understanding will be the introduction of the heart to rest and pursuits, from which will arise lofty conceptions of the grace that hath saved us, and of the glory revealed in us. Ideas of the causes of our redemption, of the consequences of our conversion, and of the remote results of our glorification, will spring up in the mind, to which the most matured of our present thoughts bear but a distant relation ; these ideas will give birth to corresponding sentiments ; these sentiments again, will be only the ideas of other sentiments more lofty still ; the mind will go on expanding and expanding for ever ; the heart will be yet more and more elastic with life and love. Seeing God, and enjoying his presence in Christ, we shall know even as we are known. “Whether the happiness of glorified spirits is possessed in its full extent at once, on their first admission into heaven ; or whether it is continually progressive as towards a goal, we cannot determine. Doubtless, from the very commencement of that state, there is a fulness of joy, a sense of perfect bliss ; and yet, in all probability, this is only the introduction to a continued, interminable progression in glory ; an everlasting approximation of the

soul towards its Divine centre, the only, happy God.”*

And the glory we receive, we shall reflect. “Christ shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.” 2 Thess. i. 10. His cross will be seen in the light of the throne; the throne will appear in the lustre of the cross; and in the church, made perfect and glorified, the cross and the throne will be arrayed in beauties at which angels will be astonished. Through the church, Christ will disclose, to all the beings who contemplate her, the mysteries of his mercy, the wonders of his love, the wisdom of his providence. In the church he will be seen with the rod of his care, and the sceptre of his authority. Each member of the church will diffuse his spirit, and rehearse his praise, for the instruction and gratification of all the rest; for in each his love and wisdom will appear in new combinations, in varied forms. Each saint will tell the tale of his love as he hath been taught it, as well by the circumstances of his journey, as by the Spirit who guided him to rest; and as no two saints will be found to have trod precisely the same path, all will be able to throw some light on the Saviour’s manifold wisdom

and infinite grace. Each will memorialise his love in the hearts of all, and be a witness to the kindness of his purpose, to the sufficiency of his atonement, to the fulness of his salvation, and to the faithfulness of his word. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." 1 John iii. 2.

Delightful thought! we shall see Him face to face. What a sight! We shall see patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, the excellent of all times and of all places; but the most glorious object will be "the Lamb in the midst of the throne." How refreshing to our spirits is the hope of seeing the King in his beauty! The sight of a dear parent, of a much-loved child, of an esteemed friend, is pleasing; but to see Jesus—and to see him, not as he was, despised and dishonoured, but as he is,—this will be heaven: for then we shall be like him. When the vision is perfect, the transformation will be entire.

Our minds will be like his. The eye will be quick to discern, the judgment matured to reason, the memory tenacious to retain. Our liability to err will be destroyed. Having washed our robes, and made them white in his blood, and the work of sanctification being perfected, we shall be holy,

as he is holy. Intuitively we shall perceive what he approves, and approve what he appoints : nor will the delight of the Redeemer in the redeemed be more entire, than their subjection to his authority will be complacent.

Our bodies will be like his—spiritual, immortal, glorious. They will not be animal machines, formed and employed for physical purposes ; but moral suns in a perfectly spiritual system, established for the manifestation of His glory who died for sinners, around whom, as the centre of all light and glory, they will eternally revolve—borrowing, and then reflecting his lustre. “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” Phil. iii. 21.

II. These are our hopes, our abiding expectations. May we not, then, reach the apostle’s conclusion—“that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us ?”

Paul *did* reach this conclusion ; but he did not reach it hastily, nor without evidence. He placed the trials of earth and the joys of heaven in juxtaposition, and then decided upon the case, recording his conviction that the one were unworthy of a comparison with the other. Take the idea of

number,—the joys of heaven are infinitely greater than the sorrows of earth; the idea of weight,—the one are light as air, the other are more substantial than the pillars of the universe; the idea of degree,—the one just make up a cup that may be drank, the other constitute a fathomless, a shoreless ocean; the idea of duration,—the one are but for a moment, the other are for ever.

Was not the apostle right, then, in the judgment he formed? But it may be asked, if the joys of heaven so far exceed the sorrows of earth, why did he institute a comparison between them? Why? Just because it was the Lord's will that his people should, by comparing one thing with another, be induced to think much of the end of their journey, and but little of the way, and because he wishes them to be happy in time as well as in eternity. Paul knew also the trials to which the Lord's saints were exposed in his day, and the consolation they needed to enable them to bear up under them. He was further aware that some of them were tempted to think their lot a hard one. Hence he brought before them the cross and the crown,—the conflict and the spoil,—the storm of time and the calm of eternity.

There were, moreover, certain convictions and feelings which he was anxious to produce in their minds.

He wished to convince them that the terms of discipleship were not hard. Hear this, ye afflicted saints, and ponder it. The terms of discipleship, even when goods were confiscated, when persons were imprisoned, when life was sacrificed, were not hard. Even then God dealt mercifully, kindly with his church. And will you complain of your trials? To be glorified with Christ, you must suffer for him the affliction which he lays upon you. Of this you have no doubt. You gave up your hearts to the Lord, assured that, if you enjoy the consolations of his Spirit, you must bear and do his will; and the prospect of trial did not deter you from making unreserved consecration of yourselves to his service. You were told that you would have to enter the kingdom through much tribulation, and you believed it. The moment you took up his cross, you touched his sceptre; and you swore allegiance to his cause at the very time you apprehended the assault of his foes. Your oath of fidelity was their signal of attack. As you entered the pasture to feed, you were apprised of the struggle that awaited you. You were called to part with sin for Christ, and you hesitated not to—

“Tread the world beneath your feet,
And all that earth calls good or great.”

You expected afflictions, and you have had them. But, do not think that they have been either too many or too heavy. You may have had trials which others have escaped ; but, in all probability, you have received blessings which have been withholden from them. If the Bible be true, the more you are tried, the more you are blessed. Much of your knowledge and experience is attributable to sanctified affliction ; and but for the piercing thorn, you would have been unconscious of the virtue of the balm that heals. Comparing, then, your *present* enjoyments with your afflictions, you cannot say that the terms of discipleship are hard. But how disproportioned are your sorrows here, and the glory that shall be revealed in you hereafter ! The terms of discipleship hard !—on the contrary, are they not easy ? The apostle wished suffering Christians to feel that they were easy. Will *you* say they are not easy ? No, you cannot say this ; for what are the perils of a short voyage to the land of promise that lies before you ? Storms may beat, fears may arise, it may be difficult for you to make way against wind and tide ; but the vessel is safe, your Father is at the helm, and you must reach the shore. How trifling are your present inconveniences, to the glorious treasure in store for you ! Heaven is near. A moment or two more, and heaven is your own.

And can you get to heaven so soon, and in circumstances so merciful? Is it true that eternal day will certainly succeed this short night of storms?—that upon the termination of your conflicts you will receive a crown that fadeth not away? And will you, can you complain? For your salvation Christ bled and died;—the Father bruised him for you. The chastisement of your peace was upon him. By his stripes you are healed. For your sakes he endured the contumely and reproach of a wicked world. He died that you might live, and endured his Father's frown that you might enjoy his Father's smile. He was afflicted for your sakes, but he opened not his mouth. He meekly bore the burden, and sunk that you might rise: and rise you will. After you have suffered awhile, he will make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. In his righteousness you shall be exalted. Already he has taken you out of the miry pit and horrible clay, and established your goings; and soon he will bid you rise from earth, once the scene of his conflicts, to heaven, the scene of his triumphs.

And *will* you, *dare* you murmur? Your rest is above. The Lord throws his shield over you. He appoints your path. He weighs and measures your afflictions. Every moment of your life, every step of your journey, every incident of your history, bears

testimony to his wisdom, faithfulness, and love. He has been with you, is still with you, and he will be with you to the end. And can you not trust him day by day? Will you not confide in him with child-like confidence? To live in peace, and so to live as to glorify his name, you must live one day at a time. Prudent arrangements respecting the affairs of this life are not opposed to his will—they are in harmony with it. Yet, as there is to be no boasting of to-morrow, there ought to be no unbelieving care about it. Live by faith upon the Son of God, and you will be prepared for the events of life as they arise.

“ What may be my future lot,
Well I know concerns me not ;
What the Lord appoints is best,
This should set my heart at rest.”

Indeed it should. “The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” Prov. xvi. 33. You are safe here, and you may be happy ; and when you take possession of your heavenly portion, you will be more than compensated for all your trials.

“ There shall you see, and hear, and know
All you desired and wished below ;
And every power find sweet employ,
In that eternal world of joy.”

With this impression, afflicted Christian, bear your trials, and pursue your course. The prospect of glory had an influence upon the Saviour's mind, and upon the minds of those who early suffered in his cause. "For the joy that was set before him, *he* endured the cross, despising the shame;" and in a great fight of afflictions, *they* took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Heb. xii. 2; x. 34. The hope of heaven should influence *you* in like manner. Why, else, are these glorious prospects disclosed? The mind is so constituted as to be influenced by the hope of that which is future—especially when the anticipated good far exceeds the good in actual possession. And God has revealed to you so much about heaven, that you might calmly bear the changes of earth, exclaiming—"None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy."

When Christ's disciples sorrowed, by what means did he seek to turn their sighs into songs? Did he divert their attention from the afflictions which he knew were coming upon them? or did he simply promise them support under their sufferings, and leave them without any distinct intimation of his will respecting their condition in

another world? No. He admonished them of danger, apprised them of approaching calamities, and assured them that they should have a place in his heavenly kingdom. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John xiv. 1—3.

And is there not in this communication just the information you desire, and the balm you need? The power of this promise is great, sufficient to bear you up above the cares that surround you, and to bear you onward through all the trials that oppose you. Is your heart troubled?—it may be; its anguish may be deep; but does not He who died for you know that you are afflicted? and does not the sigh of *your* heart awaken a pitiful emotion in *his*? Did you but feel more of the sensitiveness of his love, and had you more confidence in the healing measures of his wisdom, how thankfully would you receive his counsel; how cheerfully would you yield to it! You must allow him to choose the method of relief, as well as the mode of trial; and while you submit to the stroke of his providence,

you must thankfully accept the comforts of his grace. To rebel when he afflicts you, is sin : to close the door of hope he opens in the valley of trouble, is folly and sin too. As he seeks to calm the troubled breast by the tranquillising power of the hope of glory, why not at once fall in with his designs, and realise them ? For support and consolation in trouble you have often fled to the throne of grace ; and you erred not in doing so ; for you are commanded to pray, and are invited to pour out your heart before the Lord. But if the Redeemer knows that the prospect of glory is the relief your spirit wants ; and if, to afford it, he assures you of a mansion in his Father's house, will you not gratefully receive the assurance, and go on your way rejoicing ? It is not more your duty to acquiesce in his will, when he tries you, than it is your privilege to yield to his love, when he comforts you. Acquiescence is a step beyond submission. You may submit to his decisions, without being satisfied with them ; and you may mourn over trial, and yet refuse the comfort he imparts to the tried. If you are not reconciled to his dispensations, and even pleased with them, it is impossible for you to be happy while passing through them.

Accept, then, the chastisements of his hand, and with it the consolation, the strong, the everlasting

consolation of his word and Spirit—the deep, precious comfort arising from the unity of his designs, both as to your happiness in this world, and your triumph in the world to come. “Things grow better with us every day, as every day brings us nearer to our Father’s house. Be frequent in thoughts of heaven, your rest, your home, where all your sorrows shall have a full end. There is a heaven above, and the hope of it comforts and delights you here: it is well, and must be so; heaven will make you amends for everything.” “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” Col. iii. 4. “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” 1 Pet. i. 13.

“We speak of the realms of the blest;
Of that country so bright and so fair;
And oft are its glories confessed—
But what must it be to be there!

We speak of its pathways of gold;
Of its walls decked with jewels so rare;
Of its wonders and pleasures untold—
But what must it be to be there!

We speak of its freedom from sin,
From sorrow, temptation, and care,
From trials without and within—
But what must it be to be there!

We speak of its service of love ;
Of the robes which the glorified wear ;
Of the church of the first-born above—
But what must it be to be there !

Do thou, Lord, 'midst pleasure or woe,
Still for heaven my spirit prepare ;
And shortly I also shall know
And feel what it is to be there."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PRACTICAL TENDENCIES OF FAITH IN THE UNITY OF THE DIVINE PROCEDURE.

DIVINE truth is used by its holy Author to convert ungodly men to the faith, and thereby to the hope, of the Gospel ; and to purify and comfort those who, “ having received the word in much affliction,” are looking “ for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” 1 Thess. i. 6 ; Heb. xi. 10.

Truth is a mighty instrument, and it is no less appropriate than powerful. In its commands, promises, and invitations, there is authority, influence, and encouragement, adapted to the wants of our intellectual and moral nature, which cannot fail to interest the heart which God hath renewed. At the time when the conscience of a careless sinner is savingly aroused, there may be but a very feeble conception of the nature of truth. Sinners are brought to repentance, not unfrequently, when they have only a limited

acquaintance with the Bible ; and when they cannot therefore know much about either the will or mercy of God. Without an enlightened understanding there can be no distinct apprehension of the law or the Gospel ; but the Holy Spirit may subdue the pride and enmity of human nature, when the reason of his conduct is not made to appear to the person who is thus humbled and alarmed ; he may be convinced of sin, be brought into spiritual trouble, and almost into despair, before he has had time to ask, Wherefore am I wounded, and why has my heart been assailed ? The authority of God is as absolute as his grace is sovereign ; and by the thunders of a dishonoured law, he may terrify the conscience of the man who knows nothing of the revealed method of his reconciliation to his offended Creator.

The comfort of an afflicted Christian, however, very much depends upon his spirituality perceiving the mind of God in his word, the object of God in his works, and the relation of both truth and providence to his holiness and peace. To be consoled in sorrow, it is not necessary for him to comprehend all the mysteries of God and of his ways. Though unable to find out the Almighty to perfection, he may, nevertheless, enjoy perfect peace. But it is necessary for him, unhesitatingly, and with all his heart, to believe “the record

which God hath given of his Son," and of his doings. Having faith in "the law and the testimony," he may ride without fear upon the troubled waters, and enjoy a calm, settled assurance, that the voyage of life, however difficult and perilous, will end in eternal repose. Hath the Lord spoken good concerning Israel, and shall not his word stand? Hath he purposed, and shall he not bring it to pass?

The "unity of the Divine procedure" having been illustrated in the preceding pages for the consolation of afflicted Christians, that the effect of these representations of truth on their minds may be powerful and permanent, we shall, in this chapter, point out some of the tendencies of faith in the subject which we have considered—first, that the heart may be drawn to it in love; and secondly, that the mind, understanding God's methods, may adore them, and then endeavour to conform to them. "But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Cor. iii. 18.

I. To give the force of concentration to those facts which, while they allay fear and awaken hope, are intended to regulate our conduct, we

must *review* some of the leading points of remark which have engaged our attention.

1. We have seen that God does govern his church, and each member of it. His people are his peculiar charge, and he careth for them accordingly. He admits them to all the privileges of his house, and bids them rejoice in hope of glory; but he is their Ruler as well as their Father, and, while he comforts them, he orders their goings. This is their mercy. Did he console them only, they would be neither safe nor happy. They need the soothing influences of his love to allay their anxieties when sorrows abound and trials perplex, but they are as much dependent on his counsel for a *safe* walk, as they are on his favour for a *happy* walk. In fact, his concern for their welfare is evinced by the control which he exercises over them. So prone are they to err, and so totally unable are they of themselves to choose the right path, that, were they not to be led by unerring wisdom, the consequences of their follies and mistakes would be disastrous, if not ruinous, to their spiritual welfare. "I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye." Psa. xxxii. 8.

To take a clear and a comprehensive view of

God's government, we must mark the rule of his procedure, the discipline he employs, and the benefits which he actually confers. His rule is the course of his own conduct—involving the purposes which he has formed, and the reasons of them, together with the results of their accomplishment, and his will respecting his people, as stated, explained, and enforced in his word. His discipline includes the positive work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, with all the lessons he teaches, and the impressions he produces; and also the various afflictions and disappointments of life; for by these Christian principles are tested, and Christian habits are formed. By the benefits he confers, we mean the knowledge, the life, the love, the peace, and other blessings with which he enriches those who, having been exercised by affliction, reap from it the peaceable fruits of righteousness. The government of God is always righteous, always wise, always gracious.

2. We have seen also that God's plans are fixed and uniform. "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations." Psa. xxxiii. 11. "He is of one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth." Job xxiii. 13. He does not invariably adopt the same discipline with all his people, nor always teach the same lessons

in precisely the same way. Providence may be so irregular in its movements as to appear to have neither reasons nor laws for its operations. The several dispensations of his mercy, too, though not at variance with each other, have had their distinct and peculiar characteristics. The patriarchal age differed from the prophetic; the Abrahamic from the Mosaic; and the Christian dispensation differs from all, and is superior to all. 2 Cor. iii. 7—11.

It is, however, instructive to observe, that through all past ages the government of God has, as to general principles, been uniformly the same. He being immutable, unchanging and unchangeable must be his laws—those laws, we mean, which are moral, and which rise necessarily out of his nature. As a God of holiness, he can never approve of iniquity; and as a just God, he can never relax the obligations of his creatures to do that which is right in his sight. He may alter the form of administering law, and change the entire frame-work of an economical dispensation; but he must maintain those principles which he asserts to be eternal as his throne. Sin must be punished, either in the person of the transgressor, or in the person of the surety. The law does not provide a substitute for those who violate its sanctions and incur its penalties: the

suffering of the innocent on behalf of the guilty belongs not to the province of law, but to an economy of grace. Still, the honour of law and the authority of the Lawgiver may both be preserved, although the guilty shall be pardoned, and be restored to the Divine favour and friendship. Christ died, the just for the unjust, to bring them to God. "To declare his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Rom. iii. 26; 1 Pet. iii. 18.

So far then our way is plain, and our prospects are bright. We who have revolted from our Creator and Judge, may return to him through Christ, with an assurance that he will not cast us out, but that he will pardon our sins, and remember our iniquities no more. And this principle of mediatorial intervention is seen running through God's dealings with Adam's fallen race in all ages; yea, it is the basis of the fellowship he has ever holden with his apostate creatures. Jesus Christ is described as a lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Rev. xiii. 8. He was virtually slain, though not actually so; and, having undertaken to redeem man from death, forgiveness was exercised to all who sought mercy through this appointed medium: so that in all ages God has been known as "the Lord, the Lord God, mer-

ciful and gracious; slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and in truth." Abel, Noah, and others, were accepted through Christ as freely and as positively as Paul and Peter. There is a way of escape from the consequences of sin, and but *one*. The God of the Jews is the God of the Gentiles, and sinners under the law are saved in the same way as sinners under the Gospel.

But this is only one point in the uniformity of the Divine government. It is, doubtless, the leading one, and that which regulates the fellowship of sinful creatures with their merciful God; but there are other considerations to which afflicted Christians should give attention. In all ages, nations, families, and individuals, have been punished for their sins; and upon their repentance, judgment has been averted. God's people have always been tried—some of them more heavily than others; but the children of his love have been chastised by the rod of his covenant. The Old Testament shows this as clearly as the New. Backsliders have always been made to feel that sin is an evil and a bitter thing; and none have ever departed from the fountain of living waters, without being corrected for their folly. God has always heard and answered the prayer of faith, never having said to the seed of Jacob, "Seek ye me in vain." He has also invariably

honoured the confidence of his saints ; affording comfort to the sorrowful, support to the weak, rest to the weary, and counsel to the perplexed. He has, too, from the beginning, permitted Satan to tempt and vex the excellent of the earth, either by his own direct influence, mysteriously exerted upon the heart that the Spirit hath set free, or by the agency of those wicked men whom he hath instigated to deeds of darkness and of blood. The Lord, also, has always overruled the trials of his people for their good.

The truth of these statements might be confirmed by many citations from the Scriptures, but the reader's knowledge of the Bible will, it is hoped, enable him, without difficulty, to trace out the points of agreement in God's government which have given interest and importance to every age of the world, and to every dispensation of the church.

3. It is important to remember that the motives by which God is actuated in his dealings with his people, are those of pure benevolence, disinterested love. "We cannot possibly understand all the reasons of God's dealings towards us. The very thing which we feel to be a trial may be the only means by which we could be brought to anything like spiritual maturity : and the very thing we wish for, with the most restless and passionate solicitude, may just be that thing which, if it were

given, would completely obstruct the progress of holiness within us. Hence, in reflecting upon the mysterious aspect which the ways of providence frequently assume, it will be well to recollect, that there must be reasons in the mind of God, perfectly satisfactory to his wisdom ; and that, therefore, they would be satisfactory to ours, if we knew them : that these reasons, whatever they are, must certainly have a regard to our good, and that the time of ignorance and anxiety cannot be long ; for, either circumstances will evolve which will plainly interpret the process, which will distinctly teach us *why* we suffered such and such things ; or, if not—if even they remain mysterious to the last, yet, ‘ what we know not now, we shall know hereafter.’ ” As we live by faith, so by faith we must walk ; and he who values the peace of his own mind will never exclude the comfort of a promise because of the mysteriousness of the circumstance to which the promise itself refers. In this world we have more to do with facts than with reasons ; in the next we may have to do with reasons and facts, too ; but amidst the chequered scenes of earth, there will appear “ the wheel within a wheel ” which we shall not be able to disentangle. “ How unsearchable are God’s judgments, and his ways are past finding out ! ”

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There is, however, no obscurity about Divine motives. God is love; and his dealings with his people are all influenced and regulated by love. The storm, no less than the calm which succeeds it at his bidding, is the expression of his love. Pains, as well as pleasures, are the utterances of his love—of love that never can be betrayed into forgetfulness or error—of love that never can be induced to withhold a good, nor unnecessarily to inflict an evil. The throne is occupied, the rod is used, by love. Love has the command of one universe, and the administration of the laws and resources of another, for the benefit of the church. Even Jehovah's perfections are all subservient to the cause which his love has espoused. Mercy pleads, truth defends, and justice decides, for love. Affliction is one of the most important of the agencies which love selects to accomplish the tenderest of its purposes, and to lodge in the humble heart the richest of its blessings. Our Father who is in heaven is actuated by love in all that he does and permits. Precious solace this to our troubled souls! "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." Isa. liv. 10.

4. It must also be recollected, that the end

which the Lord contemplates in his dealings towards us, is our benefit. All the results of his procedure are such as he can regard with complacency; and they delight him, because they bless his people. It is well—it must be well, with the righteous. Of this, no more doubt need be entertained, than of the perfection of that righteousness through which they are accepted in the Divine sight. “He afflicts us for our profit.” Heb. xii. 10. “Mark that Scripture. Let it be engraved on the heart of every afflicted Christian. Here is unfolded the great secret which actuates the Most High in the severest of his afflictions. Fathers of our flesh corrected us after their own pleasure. Of none but the heavenly Parent can it be said, that his inflictions were invariably intended for our profit. In him there can be no caprice or feeling, no error in judgment, no mistakes as to the object, the cause, or the motive of the correction. The *objects* of his fatherly chastisements are his own sons and daughters, whom he is preparing for glory. The *causes* are their omissions of duty, their short-comings in love, their wilful transgressions, and their dulness in spiritual learning. The *motive* is their true and eternal benefit. The Scripture here calls it, ‘their profit.’ What heart can sufficiently exult at eternal gain? What power of calculation can

estimate its amount? This profit is, that we might be PARTAKERS OF HIS HOLINESS. Not the holiness of angels, but of God himself.”*

5. Another point of attention has been, that God’s methods, though always merciful, are not invariably the same. To his mind there is nothing perplexing—all is direct and plain; to our minds, however, his movements are sometimes so intersected, as to be mysteriously perplexing. Yet he brings his purposes to pass at the best period, and by the fittest means. “His counsels of old are faithfulness and truth;” still, the methods of their accomplishment vary, because different minds require the very opposite discipline, and because the same mind may pass through so many changes as to render necessary great and even sudden alterations in the mode of its treatment. Human nature is essentially the same, always, and in all places; yet so numerous are its follies, so perverse is its spirit, so diversified are its infirmities, that the method that saves one Christian might injure another. Every child of God, therefore, is led in a way, and exercised by trials, exactly suited to his character, and to the end which God intends to bring to pass for him. God’s methods are wise and gracious; but unless we remember that there

is a necessity for their being sometimes varied, we may be tempted to think that a change in the conduct of God implies a change in his character ; whereas nothing is more certain than that he is “the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” James i. 17.

II. Now observe the unity of God’s procedure—for to this point the preceding remarks were intended to conduct you. He governs his church ; his plans are fixed and uniform ; the motives by which he is actuated are those of disinterested love ; and the methods by which he accomplishes his will are various. All this is important in itself ; but the one great truth to which it leads, and which it illustrates, is, that the Lord’s purposes, his ways, his discipline, every thing he does, whatever he permits, the afflictions and cares of his people, their inward and outward conflicts, all these are parts of one administration, designed for one grand and blissful consummation—the holiness, the peace, the joy of his church—the church which he loved with an everlasting love, and which church shall be his associate in life and felicity for ever.

Yes, brethren, “all things are for your sakes,” and “all things are yours ; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death,

or things present, or things to come ; all are yours ; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." 1 Cor. iii. 21—23. Patriarchs, prophets, and apostles lived and laboured for you. The dispensation of types and shadows was introduced, and it vanished away for you. The Old Testament, with its narrations, warnings, and promises, was written for your instruction in righteousness, as well as the New, with its doctrines, invitations, and precepts. The fulfilment of prophecy is for the confirmation of your faith ; the manifestations of the Saviour's mercy to those who call upon him in truth, are for the encouragement of your hope. Angels serve and saints pray for you. Interested in Christ, you have an interest in all his works, in all his people, and in all his perfections. He is head over all things to the church, Eph. i. 22 ; and as all things were created by Christ and for Christ, even nature, with its innumerable resources, is subordinated to your welfare. Apart from your benefit he neither lives nor reigns. He has identified your interests with his own ; and has so intermingled those which concern his glory with those which relate to your happiness, that he never issued a command, nor made a promise, nor gave an invitation, without some concern for your benefit. The infinite, the inconceivably numerous operations of his hand in

providence and grace, are all directed to your good. He sends forth his word and Spirit to preserve and extend his mediatorial dominions; but he never breaks an idolatrous altar, nor overturns a superstitious system, nor converts a single soul, without, at the same time, either opening to you some direct sources of joy, or laying a foundation for your future happiness. He subjects all orders of beings, from the highest of the animate to the lowest of the inanimate, to the purposes of his grace, and then directs the whole machinery of his operations to your advantage. He makes you, so to speak, the centre of his vast dominions, and your holy joy the magnetic point to which the needle of every compass shall involuntarily tend. Your soul, though an insignificant thing, compared with his infinite nature, is, nevertheless, the one object, in common with the souls of all who love him, of his contemplation and care, which he authoritatively commands nothing to injure, and everything to bless. His whole heart is concentrated on *thee*, and his ruling concern is to do *thee* good.

Is not this fact a consoling one?—a fact that every Christian should love and welcome? Does God purpose? “He predestinates his people to be conformed to the image of his Son.” Rom. viii. 29. Does he raise up for them a Saviour?

it is that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify them unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Titus ii. 14. Does he send the Holy Spirit into their hearts? it is that they might be sanctified. Ezek. xxxvi. 25. Does he call upon them to believe the truth? it is that they may be purified both by the truth itself, and by the belief of it. John xvii. 17; Acts xv. 9. Does he make unto them exceeding great and precious promises? it is that they may be made the partakers of the Divine nature, and may escape the pollutions of the world. 2 Pet. i. 4. Does he afflict them? it is for their holiness. Heb. xii. 10. Does he favour them with the preaching of the Gospel, and with the ordinances of religion? it is that they may be edified in love. Eph. iv. 16. Does he remove them by death to another world? it is that their spirits may be presented stainless in his presence. Eph. v. 27. And when he commissions the archangel's trump to sound, it will be that their entire nature may be perfected. Psa. xvii. 15.

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” 1 John iii. 2. “All things work together for good to them that love God.” Rom. viii. 28.

III. But, says the afflicted Christian, is it so? —can it be so in my case? What! may I believe, ought I to believe, that the darkest, the bitterest events, are to me gracious dispensations; and that in the end they will be advantageous to my spiritual interests? Could I be persuaded of this, it would relieve me of a thousand fears, and be ballast and power to my almost shipwrecked soul! But how can these things be?

“ Oh, could I but believe,
Then all would easy be;”

but trials such as mine exclude the hope that for me there come brighter and better times.

Still, brethren, whatsoever be your cares and conflicts, and though all things appear to be against you, if you are indeed the “children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus,” you may believe, you ought to believe, that God will deliver you out of your afflictions, and overrule them for your good. Do you not believe in his general superintendency of human affairs, and in the speciality of the care which he exercises over the people of his love? The government of earth, of heaven, and of hell, is on Christ’s shoulders; and the administration of all your affairs, whether mighty or minute, is with him. However disordered the events of life may appear to your minds—though

as irregular and as uncontrollable as the waves of the sea ; yet in God's government there is no confusion, nor anything like it. One event is connected with another in beautiful harmony : and could you see as God sees, the most adverse circumstances would rise before you, either as causes or as effects of a system of means ordained solely for the welfare of those he loves. But though you cannot see, you are bound to believe his testimony about human events, as well as about those which are Divine ; and to believe, too, as firmly in the night of adversity, as in the day of prosperity. Yes, whether a thousand comforts are lavished upon you, or whether as many trials concur to blast your prospects, and to desolate the shore with your wrecked hopes ; in either case, you are expected to believe that God, your God and Saviour, is with you, and that for your benefit he is accomplishing some of the gracious purposes of his covenant. And you will never enjoy solid peace till you do this.

You will not, it is hoped, find in these pages a single remark that will lead you to despise affliction any more than to induce you to faint under it. Take trial as trial ; and receive correction whenever it may be sent, and by whatsoever means. But no affliction should ever be allowed to shake your confidence in those promises which declare

that God, by afflicting you, intends to bless you. "In all dispensations we should be careful not to let go the *benefit*, either by falling into a state of despondency, or by being inattentive to our feelings and sentiments in the affliction; or by impatience under it."*

But you complain of the difficulty of believing that God is doing all things well when he tries you severely. No one can say it is easy; still, what right have you to complain of those exercises for which he has engaged to strengthen you? and we cannot help thinking, that you have mistaken the nature of that believing state of mind which has just been urged upon your attention. Do you not conceive, first, that strong faith is essential to a humble resignation of yourselves and of your circumstances to the will of God, and to a hope that all your trials will terminate felicitously; and, secondly, that as your faith is not strong, you cannot do this, nor can it be expected that you should?

It is true, that without the power of God you cannot discharge the easiest of Christian duties; and we know that some mental exercises are easier than others. But you need—at least this is our impression—not so much *strong* faith, as *simple*

faith ; not, in reality, the faith of a *man*, but the faith of a *little child*. Indeed, simple faith is strong faith. But this is not your idea of strong faith : and if you were asked to explain what you mean by strong faith, you would, perhaps, find the explanation to be as difficult as the exercise you had to define. You have in your mind, in all probability, the case of Abraham, who, it is said, “ was strong in faith, giving glory to God.” Now this certainly means, that in faith, or that by believing, he was strong ; that is, by faith in God’s word, he was strengthened to do God’s will. His strength was just in proportion to his faith. The strength belonged to the man, rather than to the faith ; although it was by faith that he was made strong.

Just look at this in connexion with the offering up of Isaac. He was assured that he was the child of promise, in whom all families of the earth were to be blessed ; he believed the testimony with all his heart ; and it was this belief, or this faith, which enabled him at once to obey the command, “ Arise, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” Gen. xxii. 2. The apostle says, “ By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac : and he that had received the promises offered up his only

begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called." Heb. xi. 17, 18. And when your faith is as simple as Abraham's, your obedience will be as prompt and as cheerful, and your hope as vigorous and as buoyant, as his. "Simple faith enters into the *possession*, rather than lingers on the *expectation* of the blessing."*

By simple faith, we do not mean foolish credulity, nor presumptuous confidence; but the belief of a Divine testimony, solely upon the authority of the Divine Being, in whose name, and by whose command, the testimony is borne. God is true, and cannot deceive; he is powerful, and he can do whatsoever pleaseth him. With the difficulties attending the fulfilment of a promise, supposing them to exist, we ought not to perplex ourselves; they belong to the Almighty Promiser, who foresaw them before the promise was made, and not to those whose minds the promise was designed to relieve. Were our faith to be guided by intelligent perceptions of the methods by which the promise would be fulfilled;—if we were not to believe, till we could explain how the thing might be brought to pass,—then to hesitate before we believed would be right. But this is not the case. Nothing is more obvious than that God's

* Hawkes.

word is to be credited simply and alone because it is his word. Hath he spoken, and shall he not bring it to pass? And if we can divest our minds of the perplexing question, "*how can* this promise be fulfilled?" and believe that it must come to pass because he hath spoken it, we shall have peace in trouble, and we shall be strong to do or to suffer his will. Abraham's strength lay in his faith, and in faith lies ours also.

It is necessary also to remember that weak faith can do, or rather that a babe in grace can do by faith just the exploits which God requires of those who are of full age. To believe is to credit the truth of what is spoken, or to admit the truth of it; at least, this is the faith which we are urging upon the attention of afflicted Christians: for we are not speaking so much of that faith by which a sinner is justified in the sight of God, as of the faith which secures to a justified man peace in trouble. Not that there is any essential difference in the faith of these two persons, or of the faith of this man at different periods of his life;—excepting that the awakened sinner's faith involves actions and results which do not necessarily belong to the tried Christian's faith. In the one case, there is believing the record which God hath given of his Son, and then there is the acting upon the testimony. The sinner believes that

Christ is the Saviour, he comes to him, and then he trusts in him. In the other case, the afflicted Christian, who, it must be remembered, *has fled* to the cross, and *has received* pardon, is assured of the truth of the promises which God has made to his tried people, and he calmly waits their fulfilment. He may not see how they can be accomplished, but apparent impossibilities do not concern him, nor does the absence of knowledge as to the time or method of fulfilment, at all interfere with his peace. It is enough for him to know that the Lord hath spoken. He believes the promise, he trusts the Promiser, and he is thus consoled in the deepest of his troubles. God hath delivered; he doth deliver; and we trust that he will yet deliver. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." Psalm lv. 22.

Ah, dear brethren! you can do wonders by simple faith. Will you not, then, try to be simple in your faith? The Lord help you to believe his word, even when you are perplexed by his dealings. A little child, though unable to walk alone, can lean upon its father's arm; and you are expected to confide in God's promise: and this you *can* do. When the Jews were in trouble, Hezekiah spake comfortably to them; and it is said that the

people rested themselves upon the words which he spake unto them. 2 Chron. xxxii. 8. And when you rest on the Lord's words, as simply as they did on Hezekiah's, you will be peacefully sustained under the most oppressive of your cares; and the Lord, through your faith, will be greatly honoured.

“ While to me affliction brings
From terrestrial cares release;
Turn my thoughts to holier things,
Things belonging to my peace:
Teach me, Lord, by light divine,
What is faith, and make it mine.

Is it simply to believe
All this wondrous book contains?
Is it meekly to receive
All it teaches—not explains?
Without doubts or scruples nice,
'Thus saith God:' must this suffice?

Jesus, as a little child
At thy footstool I sit down,
By man's glosses unbeguiled,
Learning truth from thee alone;
Lord, how strait soe'er the gate,
Here I knock, and here I wait.

Thou of faith the Author art—
Thou alone canst faith bestow;
Plant this germ within my heart,
Root it deep, and make it grow:
Thou, from whom such gifts proceed,
Thou art Lord and God indeed.”

IV. The importance of faith in the unity of the Divine procedure is obvious, for it leads us to seek the realisation of God's intentions, and introduces us to calm, intelligent "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

Unbelief separates man from God, and deprives him of the light of his countenance and of the support of his arm. But he whose faith is simple and unwavering, has access to a refuge in every storm. His confidence in the promises of God brings him, through the influence which the promises have over his heart, to a resting-place in every weary hour. He is aware of God's intentions, and is thankfully alive to them; so that, instead of foolishly endeavouring to counteract his will, he falls in with his arrangements, knowing that they were all settled for his welfare. Thus he has the advantage which a purpose is intended to give him, not only when it is fulfilled, but while it is in a course of accomplishment. He goes into the "furnace of affliction," with a hope of being taken out of it, and with an assurance, that while passing through it, he shall gather up some of the most precious of God's gifts. He does not know the details of his Father's plans; and, did he allow the reasonings of a carnal mind to influence his decisions, he would conclude that God had forgotten to be gracious. But as he is the child of

faith, he casts all his care upon the Lord, and doubts not either the stability or the graciousness of his purposes. His afflictions come from God, and he finds in the heaviest of them much less to excite fear, than to encourage hope.

Yes, if when the hand of God is upon us, we believe that he is afflicting us for our good—and this his word assures us is the case—instead of murmuring at his will, and thus depriving ourselves of peace, and of prolonging the trial, by increasing its necessity, we shall fix our eye upon the good which we know he intends to bestow, and press toward it with the zeal and ardour of those who hope to gain a precious prize. All God's thoughts, feelings, and purposes lie in one direction, and why should not ours lie in the same direction? Is the Father to seek the good of his children, and are they to be indifferent to their own welfare? Are they to turn from the object which he pursues, only because he does not pursue it in their way? We sometimes lose half the benefit of our trials, simply because we do not seek for ourselves, when in trouble, what the Lord is seeking for us. Then, for the same reason, we not only vex our souls while the trial lasts, but even pass through it in so rebellious a spirit, as to render other chastisements and other trials necessary.

Afflicted companions ! we have only to seek, while we are *in* trouble, the holiness which the Lord intends to impart, to be blessed *by* trouble. It is not enough for us to know that his thoughts towards us are peace, not evil. With the knowledge of his will, there must be submission to it. Let us, then, yield ourselves to God, and we shall be borne in safety and in comfort, too, through the darkest valley, across the loftiest mountain, over the wildest ocean, to a continent of joy. If the love that afflicts us is but allowed to guide us ; if we will but follow the voice that invites us to rest while it chides us for our wanderings, and obey the hand that points us to fairer scenes while it corrects us for our sin, we shall be blessed *in* affliction as well as *after* it. Let our hearts go with God's heart, and in his love we shall find a bright and peaceful home, even in this wilderness of care. If we seek what he promises to give, and strive to become what he purposes to make us, we shall rejoice in tribulation as well as in hope, and be his patient, happy sufferers.

Without this cheerful acquiescence in the Divine will, our fellowship with God cannot be either close or refreshing. Communion with God is the free, happy intercourse of the Father with the child, and of the child with the Father—the telling out of our sorrows and cares to Him who

is "the consolation of Israel," and who will have mercy upon his afflicted. And this is one of the highest, one of the most blessed, one of the most useful of our many privileges. To be holy, wise, and joyful, we must commune with God. None of the means of grace, nor even our experience of the power of truth, will compensate for the loss of this inestimable mercy. To walk in peace, we must walk with God.

The season of trial is adapted to fellowship with God. By affliction we are taught the evil of sin, the vanity of the world, the helplessness of man, the uncertainty of health, the changeableness of all created good; and we are then urged by strong and persuasive considerations to "come boldly to a throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." When we are tried outwardly, and exercised inwardly, communion with God is salvation and succour too. How often should we have been literally overwhelmed, but for the relief we obtained in prayer! The prayerful spirit, and the believing heart, are expressive no less of God's intentions, than of our wants. He calls us to his throne, and we are filled with good. Upon us he smiles, and to our wants he ministers. We seek and obtain his help. Affliction, amongst other designs, is intended to promote communion with

him ; and our trials have done but little for us if they have not brought us upon our knees.

But there is one thought connected with this subject on which we must offer a few remarks.

“ Enoch,” it is said, “ walked with God ;” and Cowper, having caught the spirit of the expression, breathed forth his desires in one of the most beautiful of Zion’s songs—

“ Oh for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame ;
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb.”

To walk with God, we must be reconciled to him. If we are not his friends, we cannot commune with him. And the expression, “ walked with God,” implies movement on God’s part, and the movement of his people in the same direction. God walks, or his purposes and operations are directed, through certain mediums, to the attainment of certain ends ; and for his people to walk with him, to the realisation of his intentions they must direct their efforts. In afflicting them, he designs to make them the partakers of his holiness ; and for them to enjoy his presence in their afflictions, they must *desire* just what they know he purposes to do, and *determine to seek* what they know he is willing to impart. But if

they overlook his designs, and by their unbelief try to frustrate them, how can they walk with him? He and they have formed different purposes, and are moving in contrary directions. The yoke he imposes they will not wear; the path he opens before them they will not tread.

Now, does not this account for the darkness and unhappiness of some afflicted Christians? They complain of God's absence. But his absence should excite no surprise; for while he has directed his attention to their spiritual improvement, and has adopted the best measures that could be devised for their advancement in the Divine life, they have either doubted the existence of his concern for their welfare, or have disputed his right to chasten them, or perhaps have rebelled against him. Their darkness strange! One of the fixed rules of his government is, that for his tried people to enjoy his presence, they must acquiesce in his appointments:—in other words, they must walk with him, as well when he goes forth to chastise them, as when he returns to comfort them. They must agree with him that the affliction is needed; that the very affliction which he hath sent is the one, the very one, that is necessary for them; that the methods by which they are taught and purified, are the best that could be employed; and that their increased

spirituality of mind is to be the end of their discipline. Any disagreement on these points must be attended with serious consequences. Unity of feeling and purpose between God and his afflicted people, is one of the most important and interesting states of mind into which we can be brought. Let us, then, seek our profit when God seeks it, and by the same means ; then, though we pass through fire and water, we shall lean on his arm and be supported ; we shall confide in his care and be comforted ; we shall rest in his love and be strengthened.

“ So shall my walk be close with God,
Calm and serene my frame ;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb.”

CHAPTER XV.

CHRISTIAN SIMPLICITY ESSENTIAL TO CHRISTIAN CONSOLATION.

It is probable that some afflicted Christians may be induced to exclaim—"What have *we* to do with the practical tendencies of faith in the Divine procedure—we who are not so much the working, as the suffering witnesses of Christ? Had we property, we should employ it in his cause. Had we time to spare from our necessary worldly avocations for religious and benevolent engagements, we should be active in his service. Had we the gifts, the talents, the opportunities which others claim and command, we might be able to bless our generation, and hope to leave the world somewhat better than we found it. Had we health, we might spend and be spent in his vineyard—we might bear the heat and burden of the day. But with our *few*—our *very* few opportunities of doing good, our sphere of action is exceedingly limited, and we can scarcely do anything

more than passively yield to circumstances, and pray, 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.' "

All this may be true. You may be the poor, the afflicted of the land. Still, as God is to be glorified as well by your trials as by your efforts, and as *they* are the most useful who bring the most glory to his name, if you will only seek for yourselves what he has purposed to give; and if, while you believe the promises which he has made for your encouragement, you will obey the precepts which he has laid down in his word for the regulation of your conduct, your acquiescence in his will, whether as patient sufferers or as active servants, will attest the graciousness of his intentions, the peace of your own souls, and the co-operation of his Spirit with yours, to elucidate the unity of his procedure. You may think of his love in every gift he bestows, and in every affliction he sends; in every care and in every comfort; in your pains no less than in your pleasures. He thought of you, and you must remember him. He made sacrifices for you, and you are to surrender your all to him. He accomplishes his will by various methods, but he never allows his attention to be diverted, even for a moment, from your benefit; and in all your plans and pursuits you are to seek his honour. "Whether, therefore, ye

eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." 1 Cor. x. 31. Buy, sell, and so engage in your lawful occupations, as that he may be magnified. Take care of the body and of the soul, that he may have glory from both. Meet all your religious duties and privileges in the spirit of holy joy, that, as his chosen witnesses, you may show forth his praise, and amongst all classes of society advance his honour. Through his worthiness, you obtain acceptance with God; and he is worthy of more than all the sacrifices you can lay on his altar.

Will you not, then, "yield yourselves to God, as those which are alive from the dead?" Afflicted Christians ought not to be selfish, or gloomy, or rebellious. We have seen that God cares for them, and that he loves them, and that in chastening them he seeks their welfare. And if they are as simple in their habits, as he is gracious in his conduct, they must be glad and thankful, notwithstanding their trials. About this we have very strong impressions—impressions, which a calm review of all that we have written only tends to deepen. In the darkest cloud there is bright light. In the roughest path there are to be found spiritual treasures of inestimable worth. "Christian consolation" belongs to Christian sufferers; but to enjoy "the peace of God, which

passeth all understanding," they must yield as well to the counsels as to the discipline of their Father. Simple faith and filial obedience open bright prospects even to the afflicted; and this state of mind is so important, that these closing pages may with propriety be devoted to its elucidation and enforcement. Afflicted Christians—would you be consoled when you are tried? then you must be consistent in your general conduct. Your best attention is for a moment solicited.

Christian simplicity is not intellectual weakness, nor the folly of uncultivated minds. It is a state of character including all that is vital in principle and right in practice, proceeding from enlarged and correct views of the authority and love of God; and resulting in the adoption of such measures as appear to be best adapted to secure the ends of Christian profession, and to realise the objects of Christian hope. Simplicity is true wisdom—wisdom in its most efficient forms of application, whether it relate to the formation of a purpose, or the execution of a plan. In the world of mind, knowledge is capital; and it is either a blessing or a curse, just as it may be appropriated; and the ends for which "Christian Consolation" is written, will be defeated, unless the principles which have been elucidated are applied to the purposes of practical godliness. The child of God

is not a speculative theorist, nor is the child of sorrow a morbid recluse. Christian simplicity is the highest style of wisdom : and it must strike any one who thinks at all on the truths and facts of revelation, that the wisdom of the sacred writers is not more apparent in the subjects on which they write, than in the manner in which they discuss them. Their wisdom was from God. They were in fellowship with the Father of lights. They made the vision plain. He that runs may read it. In afflicting his people, God designs to do them good ; and that they may have the benefit of trial, they are taught the necessity of simple obedience, and are constrained to obey his will who tries them. Those that need consolation must, to obtain it, run, with enlarged hearts, in “the way of God’s commandments.”

Simplicity of mind always induces corresponding habits of action. A wise man will pursue his course wisely, adopting the fittest means for the attainment of his end. He will seek the largest amount of good, with the least practicable inconvenience ; he will lay his plans thoughtfully, nor allow anything, that he can control, to interfere with their accomplishment : and this is just the state of mind with which afflicted Christians should pursue their spiritual course. They must contemplate the objects of their solicitude with

great distinctness, and consecrate to their attainment their undivided attention. With all the thoughtfulness of manhood, they must blend, without guile, the simplicity of childhood. Knowing their duty, they must perform it. Aware of their interests, they must consult them on all occasions. They must have no gratifications—either possessed or desired—apart from those which administer to their holy joy. Religion must be their business—the business of every day. They must think for the soul, act for the soul, live for the welfare of the soul. The day in which this prospers, and in which the most care has been bestowed upon it, must be regarded as the most propitious of all days, even though affliction hath cast a gloom upon each of its fleeting moments. They must attach so much importance to personal religion, as to regard no toil too arduous that leads to it. They must be dead to whatever would deaden their spiritual sensibilities, and rise up to vanquish every foe that assumes even the aspect of hostility to their eternal welfare. They must believe that the care of the soul is the most responsible and important of all cares; and they must act as if they *believed*, not as if they speculated. They are not called upon to neglect one relative or social duty. Christianity is a practical thing—brought into being for practical

purposes. It disdains the bribe that indolence would offer at its shrine in seclusion. It loves the light. The early Christians were godly, but their godliness was seen, not concealed.

What we wish, then, to inculcate is—not that secular duty should be neglected under the specious pretence of meeting Christian obligations; but that the man of God should be as devoted to the concerns of his soul, as the man of the world is devoted to his business. This is the simplicity the Bible enjoins, and which God honours; and when all the arrangements of life are subordinated to the commanding interests of vital religion, the Divine Comforter will be a “place of broad rivers” to his suffering and sorrowing people. However clamorous an afflicted person may be for the comforts of God’s Spirit, he cannot expect to realise them, and his sincerity must be questioned, unless he be found doing the will of God from the heart. Afflicted Christians! as you value consolation, devote yourselves to the will of Him who hath afflicted you; and be as simple in faith and hope, in discharging your obligations, as in using your privileges. The comfort you need is subject to laws which you must obey; and to be *happy* sufferers, you must be obedient disciples.

In the course of our inquiries into the unity of the Divine procedure, we have given some atten-

tion to the purposes of the Most High—a part of truth which yields to afflicted Christians the sweetest comfort; and as faith in God's word reconciles the mind to his will, we must test our knowledge of his character by our conformity to his conduct.

I. We wish, then, that tried believers would give some attention to Christian simplicity, in connexion with the purposes which are formed under the guidance and by the help of the Holy Spirit.

Purposes must be formed. A Christian without purposes can no more expect to prosper in Divine things, than a man of business can reasonably hope to succeed in a commercial enterprise without plans. The object of a purpose is to give regularity to our movements, and to turn the current of our desires in a certain direction. Loose actions—I mean actions without thought—are ill adapted to the exigencies of afflicted Christians. Even if invalids would enjoy peace, they must have some idea of the difficulties that beset their path; they must ascertain their destinies and resources, and then resolve on the course arising out of the peculiarities of their case. One purpose, or one class of purposes, above all others, must be formed, and by these we must be governed; they must be a law within us, and a

law to us—a law by which we are bound, and which binds us to a certain course in all places and in all circumstances. We must live for God, and for the prosperity of our own souls;—whatever dishonours him or injures them, must be condemned and forsaken at any cost. His glory is our bliss : our bliss is his glory. The glorification of the soul and body at the coming of the Lord, is an object of prayerful solicitude ; but we must be anxious to be holy and spiritual even here. It is well that we seek a place among the blessed in “their everlasting habitations;” but we must seek an elevated state of spiritual religion in this life ; that so, while in the body, we may come as near as we can to the purity, and peace, and love of the saints now before the throne : and this must be done at the bidding, and in the strength of Him who is mighty to save. The will of man is changed—not annihilated—in regeneration ; and as *after* conversion it retains the bias given to it in conversion, it seems almost impossible for the man of God not to resolve to be His who hath bought him, and to seek the blessings which are promised him.

To will, is to purpose. Whatever, therefore, a man wills to do, he purposes to do ; and when purposes are formed for God, by the help of his Spirit, the decision of the understanding agrees

with the desire of the heart, and all the powers of our nature are devoted to Christ and to the welfare of the soul he hath redeemed. If to do God's will be a duty, then we must resolve to do it; and those who enjoy the Saviour's presence are constrained to serve him.

“ All that I am—all that I have,
Shall be for ever thine,”

is the form in which their allegiance is owned and their oath is taken. “*I will* go in the strength of the Lord God: *I will* make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.” Then—

II. If a purpose be worth forming, the best means of accomplishing it ought to be chosen. For example,—You resolve, in the strength of God, to promote the health and happiness of your souls. These are the objects you contemplate; and with strong impressions of their importance, you determine that every thing within the range of your influence shall be subservient to them. “Here,” you say, “is my end, great—momentous; to me it is every thing: if my soul prosper, all will be well, even though afflictions crowd my path. But is the accomplishment of my purpose so easy that I have only to desire it, and it will be done? May I assure myself that the thing must be because I have willed it, and for no other

reason?" A purpose without a plan is mockery and delusion. How can we expect that our souls will prosper, if we are irregular in the methods we employ for their welfare? Judging from the practices of some professors of religion, it would appear as if they thought it must be well with the "inner man," whether it were cared for amidst the quiet assiduities of a life of faith, or neglected through indolence and sin. But the means and the end are connected by the irreversible decisions of the Most High; and to receive the blessing he hath promised to the obedient, we must do, or bear his will. We scarcely need to be reminded that while general directions are given in the Bible, their particular application is left with enlightened and sanctified consciences. Prayer, watchfulness, the mortification of the deeds of the body, are essential to spiritual health; and he who neglects these exercises is chargeable with suicidal hostility to his own peace. But even these means must be used with a special reference to our actual condition. We must be more or less careful about our food, our dress, our social connexions, just as they do, or do not, affect our fidelity to God. When placed in new circumstances, we may have to alter our course of action; but we desire to impress upon afflicted Christians the importance of living by rule for

the health of the soul, as well as for the health of the body. If care be necessary in the one case, is it not equally necessary in the other? If we observe not the rules of the Great Physician, we shall drag on a heavy, a comfortless existence; and be nearly as far from true happiness in the church, as we were in the world.

III. With simplicity of purpose and plan, we must connect simplicity of habit.

We do not apply the term "habit" to God; but we have seen that he seeks with undeviating regularity the holy peace of those who love him. His attention is invariably, uniformly directed to their welfare.

Writing to the Philippians, Paul said of Timothy, "I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state,"—a testimony to his zeal and consistency which serves to illustrate the nature and power of Christian habits. "He is so alive to your interests and to his own obligations, that it is as natural for him to desire your growth in grace, and to do all within the compass of his ability to promote it, as it is for you, when the appetite is in health, to crave food for the body." It may be difficult to realise the object of Christian hope; but if we are free to act for God, our inclinations, sanctified by his grace, will prompt us to take the direction in

which our spiritual interests lie. Vital religion is law to the heart, and to the life too.

By Christian habit, then, we mean attention to “the things of the Spirit,” and a pursuit of them with an ardour that nothing can quench, with a regularity that nothing shall disturb. If our habits are formed after the model of nominal Christians—persons who have the form, but not the power of godliness, they will be both delusive and worthless ; and we shall add deformity to that distorted view of truth, which such persons present to those about them. But if we have the mind of Christ, if our principles are fixed and regulated by his word and grace, we shall bear our afflictions and meet all our obligations, with a cheerful, contented mind—the habitude which honours God, and which he will honour.

Afflicted Christians, cultivate, we beseech you, simple, filial habits. God is your Father. He is entitled to your confidence. It is your duty and privilege to be child-like. You must reverence his name and character ; but you may, without reserve, without fear, pour out your heart before him. You may tell him your tale of woe. You may shed your tears at his feet, and lay all your requests before his throne. His eye is always upon you ; his ear is always open to your cry. He will not forsake you. The trials he sends are medicinal,

healthful. He has blessed you. He is blessing you. His kind attentions to your peace, must be reciprocated by the exercise of confidence in his favour.

Afflicted Christians ! if you lose your simplicity, you will lose your comfort. Christian simplicity is Christian propriety, and without which you cannot hope to attain the elevation befitting you, as the chastised children of the Lord God Almighty. Is yours to be the elastic, the buoyant spiritual constitution in which health has fixed her throne, and over which health sheds her beauties ? then must you adopt the methods of living and the modes of action, which Jesus has prescribed in his word. Of all persons, afflicted Christians should be spiritually minded. Carnality of thought and affection weakens, deranges, pollutes, and unfits the believer for spiritual exercises. A heavenly mind is power ; power to calm, to restrain, to impel. O for a heavenly mind !

Afflicted Christians ! be it your daily concern to obey the precept and to plead the promise of Jesus : then will our hope of you be steadfast, “ knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.” “ If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.”

“Holy Comforter, who guidest
Those who seek thine aid Divine ;
Who in contrite hearts abidest,
Now amidst my darkness shine.
Though around me waves are swelling,
And the storms of life increase ;
If within me thou art dwelling,
I shall still be kept in peace.

’Tis thine office, blessed Spirit !
Christ’s remembrancer to be ;
Though such grace I cannot merit,
Now recall his words to me ;
Though with grief my heart seems broken,
Though thy waves go o’er my soul ;
Every word of Jesus spoken,
Makes the wounded spirit whole.

Take the things to Christ belonging,
Manifest his love to me ;
Check these thoughts with anguish thronging,
This poor heart resigned to thee.
Show me life nor death can sever
From my soul that heavenly Friend ;
Tell me he is mine for ever,
And will love me to the end.”

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